LUFTWAFFE COLOURS
Volume Three Section 4

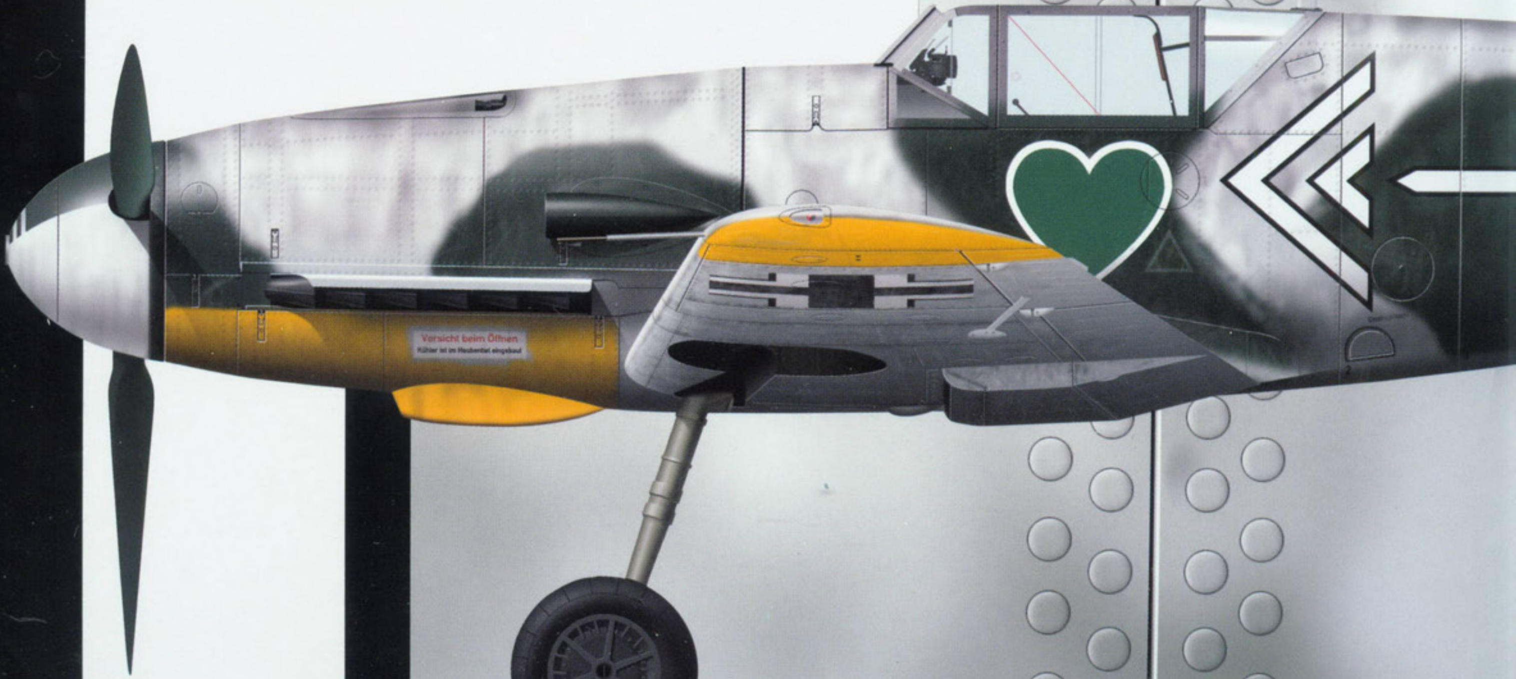
CLASSICOLOURS

JAGDWAFFE

Christer Bergström
with Martin Pegg

THE WAR IN RUSSIA

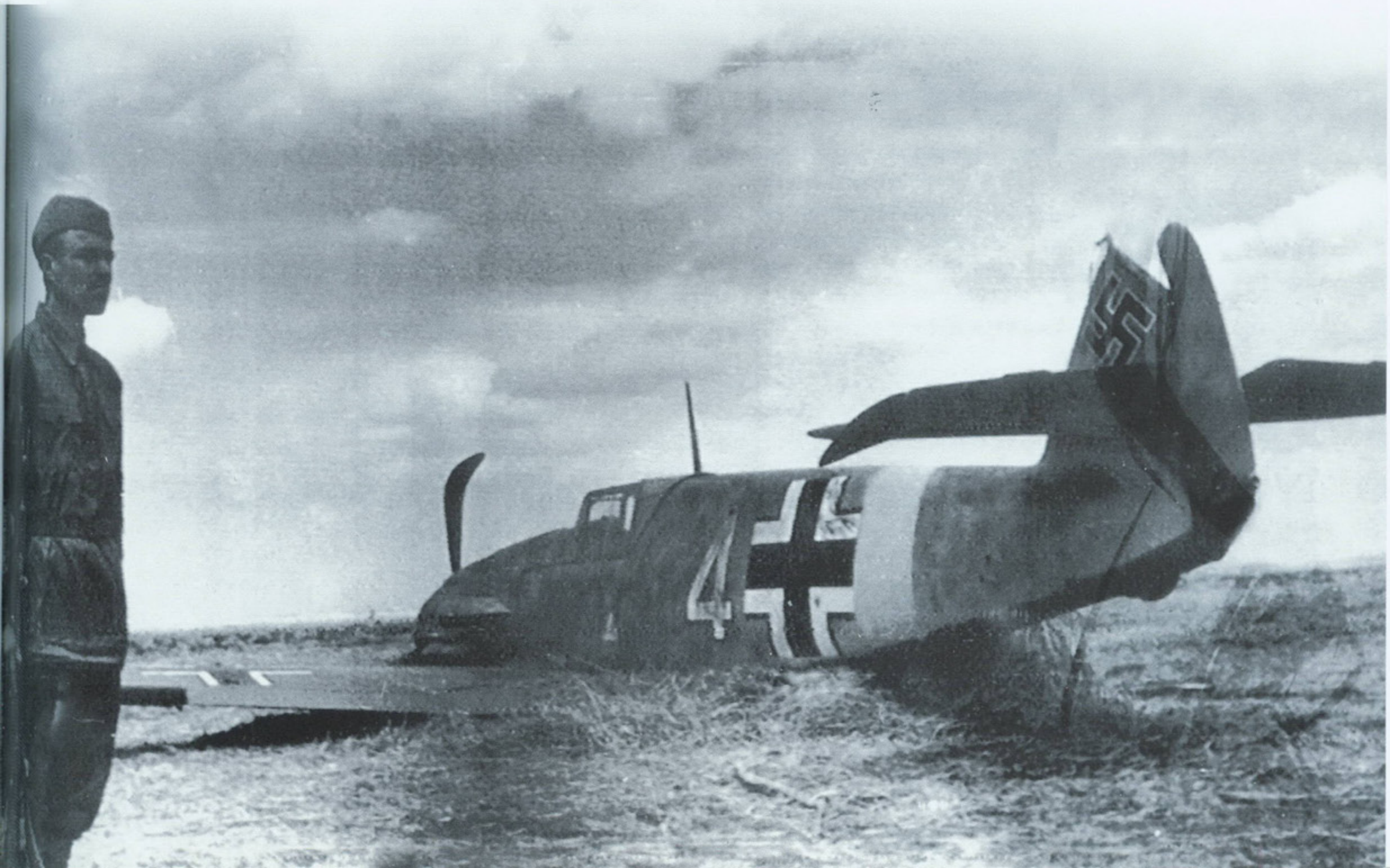
January-October 1942


Vorsicht beim Öffnen
Kühler ist im Haubenteil eingebaut

1942

WAR IN RUSSIA

> *"One sad incident occurred on 21 September. When flying an escort for Ju 87 dive-bombers followed by a freelance sweep in the Shum area, my 7. Staffel lost its acting Staffelführer, Oberleutnant Walter Lücke. Hit by anti-aircraft fire west of the Volchov, near Shum, he was forced to make a wheels-up landing. After he had come down smoothly we saw Lücke clamber out of the cockpit of his G-2 'White 5' and wave goodbye to us while standing on the aircraft's wing. Seconds later we watched in black dismay as he shot himself. It was clear to him that he would not have had the slightest chance of survival, for the Russians on the Leningrad front took no prisoners and he would probably have been killed most cruelly."*
>
> *Fw. Johann Pichler, 7./JG 77.*



January-October 1942

Some Myths Dispelled

Several myths surround the German defeat at the gates of Moscow in December 1941. One concerns the Soviets' supposed vast numerical superiority, but after the heavy losses it had suffered in the Summer and Autumn of 1941, the Soviet Army was actually numerically inferior to the *Wehrmacht* in troops, tanks, and artillery pieces. Only in the air was the Soviet Air Force – the VVS – able to maintain a marked numerical superiority, and when the Soviets launched their Moscow counter-offensive against Army Group Centre on 6 December 1941, the VVS possessed 1,376 aircraft against less than half that number in the *Luftwaffe*.

Another, perhaps more widespread myth regarding the Soviet counter-offensive, is that it was the arctic cold which paralysed German Army Group Centre. There had indeed been a cold spell in late November and early December 1941, but from 8 December milder temperatures thawed the snow so that when the German Army's offensive against Moscow collapsed, it occurred in mild weather and rain. Although the temperature again fell below minus 20°C around Christmas, Army Group Centre had by that time managed to rebuild its defence positions. That this was possible was largely due to the efforts made by new *Luftwaffe* units which had been rushed in but, nevertheless, by the end of 1941, German forces all along the Eastern Front had been forced onto the defensive.

Army Group South under *Generalfeldmarschall* Gerd von Rundstedt was the first to suffer defeat in the battle against the Soviet Army. In late November it had been expelled from Rostov and, under strong attack, Rundstedt ordered a general retreat. The withdrawal was already in progress on 30 November when Rundstedt received the first of the *Führer's* "hold at all costs" orders. This Rundstedt was unable to do, and he was relieved of his command.

In the north, *Feldmarschall Ritter* Wilhelm von Leeb's Army Group North had been forced to retreat from its advanced position at Tikhvin, which then allowed the Soviets to rebuild their supply route to Leningrad via Lake Ladoga. Further north, *General* Dietl's German troops and their Finnish allies had proved unable either to capture the important port of Murmansk or to sever the lifeline of the Kirov railway.

But an incomparably worse blow had been dealt Army Group Centre which, while the Soviets effectively removed the threat against Moscow, was brought to the verge of collapse only a few weeks after it had proudly announced the annihilation of almost all Soviet forces before the capital. What failed at Moscow was German combat morale. Their previously unimaginable defeat against the Soviet Army – which German propaganda had portrayed as a force not to be taken seriously – shook the confidence of many German soldiers during those days in December 1941.

However, as German ground troops abandoned their positions and started to withdraw, the *Luftwaffe* was called in as a 'fire brigade'. In the air, the Germans still held a convincing qualitative superiority, particularly in fighters. Although the new Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A had started reaching first-line units in the West in the Autumn of 1941, on the Eastern Front the Messerschmitt Bf 109 would remain the standard German fighter type. Indeed, it remained the only German fighter in operational use in the East until well into 1942 for, apart from the Yak-1 – which in early 1942 was not yet available in any numbers – there was no Soviet fighter which could compete with it on equal terms. Thus, aerial engagements involving Bf 109s on the Eastern Front in 1941 invariably ended in favour of the *Luftwaffe*, a fact confirmed by German victory claims and by Soviet records.

German guns, ha tracked vehicles and transport abandoned on th road from Klin, north-west of Moscow, during the retreat of 3. Panzergruppe the Winter of 19

LEFT: The Pe-2 was one of the most modern types produced by the Soviet aircraft industry in the early 1940s and first entered service in the Summer of 1941. Here the crew of a Pe-2 prepare to board their aircraft.

ABOVE: A crash-landed MiG-3. Over 3,000 of these machines were built, the first examples being delivered to VVS units in April 1941.

Another misconception concerning the quality of Soviet aircraft and the notion that the VVS was technically inferior also deserves close examination, for while the *Luftwaffe's* overall aircraft inventory was indeed technically superior to that of the VVS, it should be remembered that the *Luftwaffe* in 1941 had better aircraft than any other air force, and even the RAF with its Spitfire V – itself an outstanding aircraft – was suffering a disproportional number of losses. In the VVS, even older types, notably the I-16 *Ishak* fighter, or *Rata,* were at least equal to prevailing average world standards, whereas the most modern types produced by the Soviet aircraft industry in 1941 – the MiG-3, LaGG-3 and Yak-1 fighters, the Pe-2 dive-bomber and the ground-attack Il-2 *Shturmovik* – were of highest world standards.

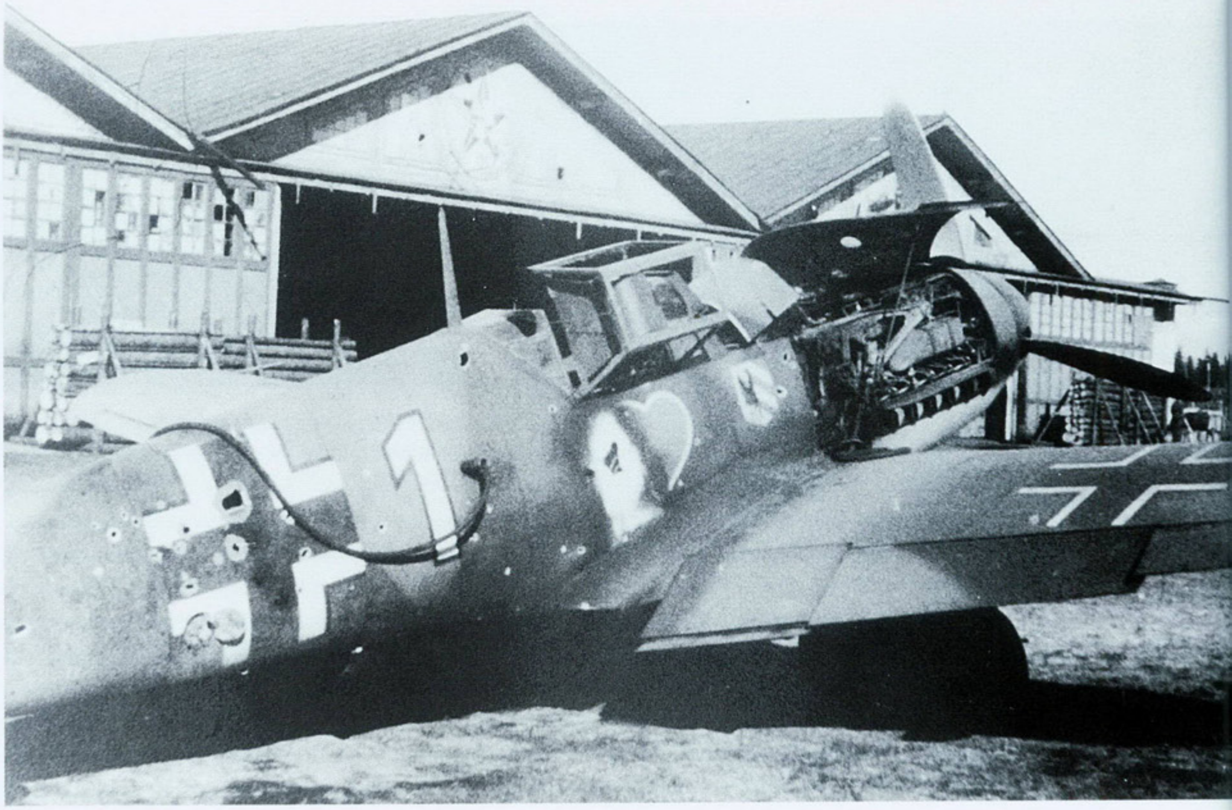
However, the decisive German qualitative superiority in the air was due not only to the excellence of the Bf 109 F. An additional factor was that *Luftwaffe* aircrew were better trained and were more experienced. They also employed superior tactics which called for *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots to operate in close teams in which the *Rottenführer* was the sword and the wingman, or *Rottenflieger*, served as a shield. With good, reliable radio receivers and transmitters installed in all German fighters, this tactic could not be beaten, certainly not by Soviet fighter pilots, whose aircraft in most cases had no transmitters installed. Furthermore, VVS fighter pilots still clung to the inflexible three-aircraft Vee-formation which originated during the First World War when the doctrine was to fight individually.

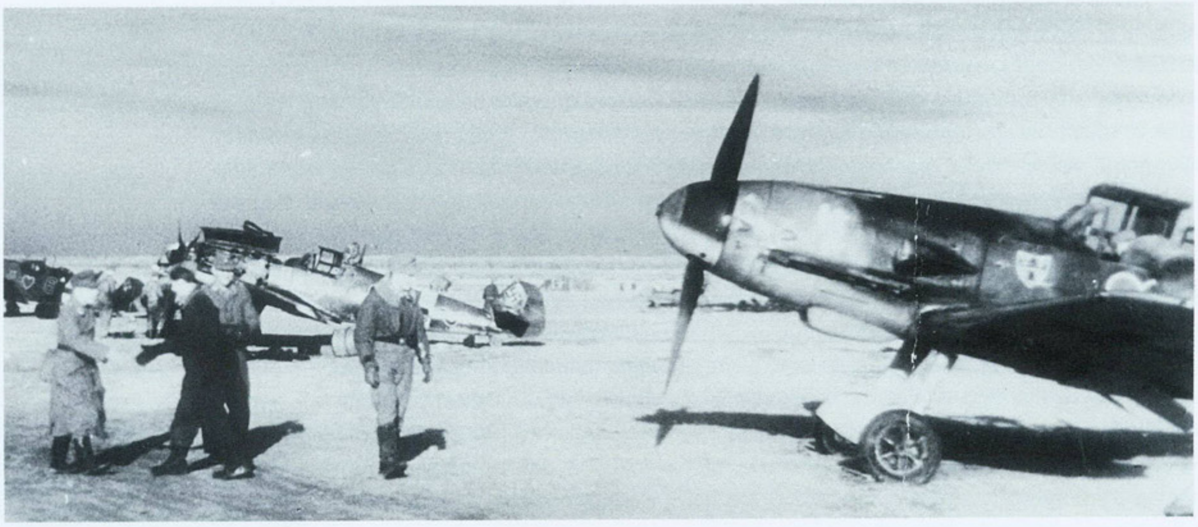
Another important reason for the high victory scores attained by the best German fighter pilots, two of whom – Werner Mölders and Günther Lützow – had surpassed the 100-victory mark in the East in 1941, was the emphasis placed on *freie Jagd*, or free hunting missions. Inspired by *Baron* Manfred von Richthofen during the First World War, this not only allowed ambitious fighter pilots to search out their prey but it also permitted them to choose whether to accept or avoid combat. Conversely, Soviet fighter pilots operated under completely different conditions; their mission was simply to beat the enemy wherever they encountered him, whether in the air or on the ground. While the German word for fighters was *Jäger*, or hunter, the Soviets adopted *Istrebitel*, or destroyer, and when carrying out pure fighter missions were bound either to provide close escort for slower aircraft – which deprived them of both speed and freedom of action – or to fly fighter patrols within strict territorial boundaries. If an enemy aircraft crossed the boundary, pursuit was abandoned, an important reason why the number of *Luftwaffe* aircraft returning to base with battle damage, compared with those totally destroyed, was higher on the Eastern Front than elsewhere.

BELOW: A Bf 109 attacking a Soviet aircraft.

Even before the outbreak of hostilities, Soviet aircrew were less well trained than their *Luftwaffe* opponents, but after the German invasion of June 1941, the Soviets' huge losses compelled them to shorten aircrew training from already inadequate levels to a standard where novice pilots barely were able to land their aircraft. Additionally, more than two years of war had produced a core of élite German airmen, the best of which were unequalled anywhere in the world. Needless to say, a Bf 109 pilot such as, for example, 9./JG 54's *Oblt.* Hans-Ekkehard Bob – who by the end of 1941 had logged 1,541 flights, 437 combat missions and had 39 confirmed victories – already possessed a tremendous advantage over almost any Soviet airman he encountered.

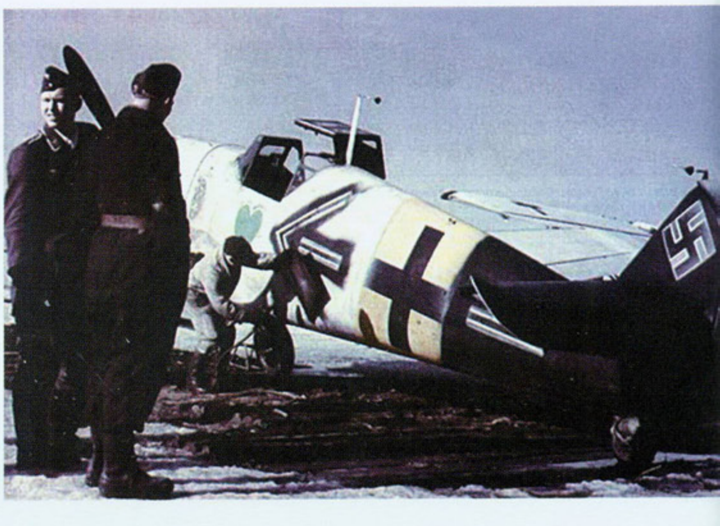
RIGHT: 'White 1' was normally flown by the Staffelkapitän of 1./JG 54, Oblt. Heinz Lange, who led the Staffel for a year from 1 October 1941 to 2 November 1942. This photograph shows Lange's aircraft at Krasnogvardeisk where it was damaged on the ground by Soviet artillery fire.



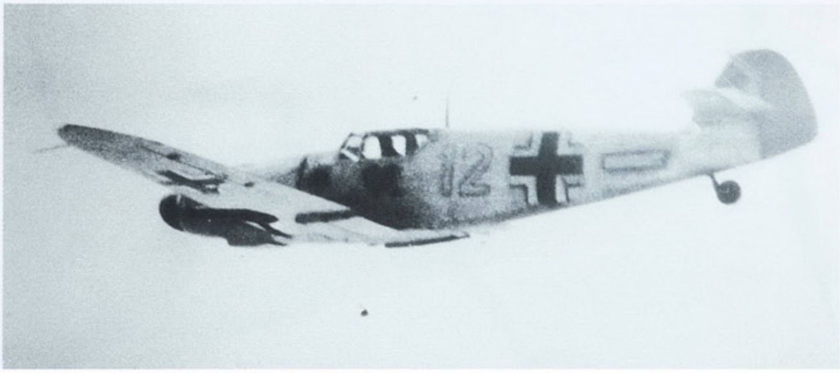


LEFT: Photographed in the early Winter of 1941-1942, these Bf 109s of III./JG 54 have yet to receive their white winter camouflage.

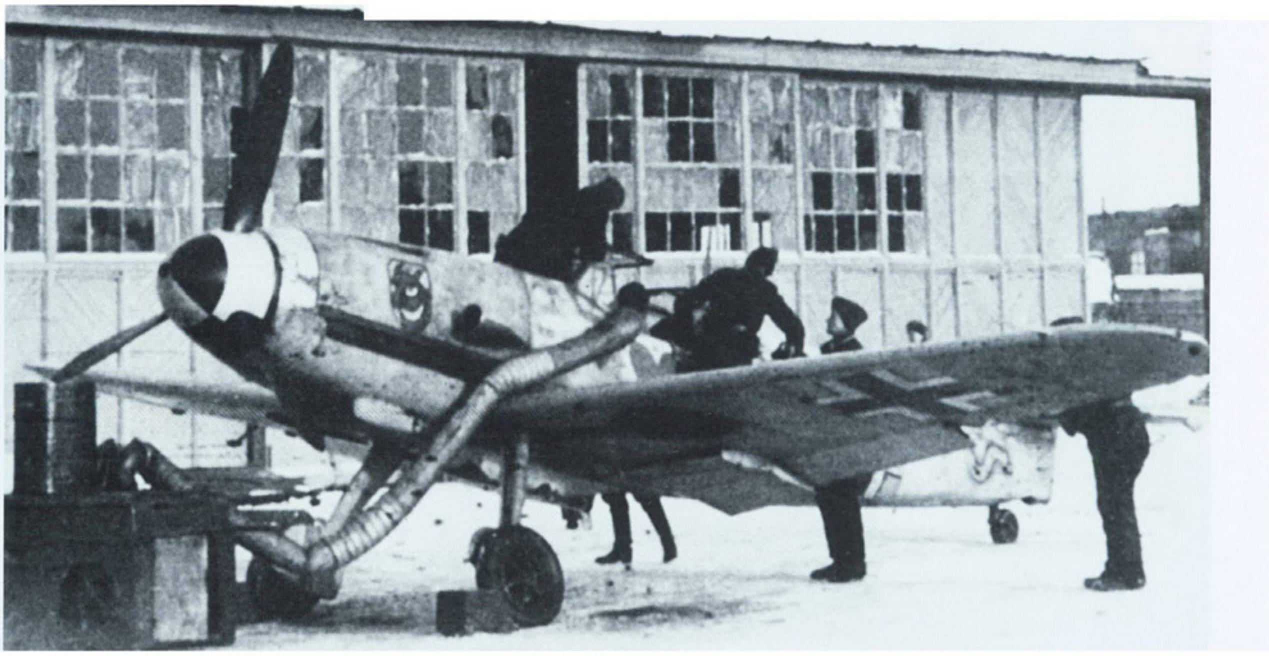
RIGHT: Holding a rectangular piece of metal as a mask, a member of JG 54's ground staff applies white winter camouflage to the aircraft flown by Hptm. Dietrich Hrabak, the Kommandeur of II. Gruppe. Note that apart from the winter camouflage, the original factory finish is visible around the fuselage Stab markings and the Hakenkreuz on the tail, and also that the machine has already been oversprayed in particularly dark colours.

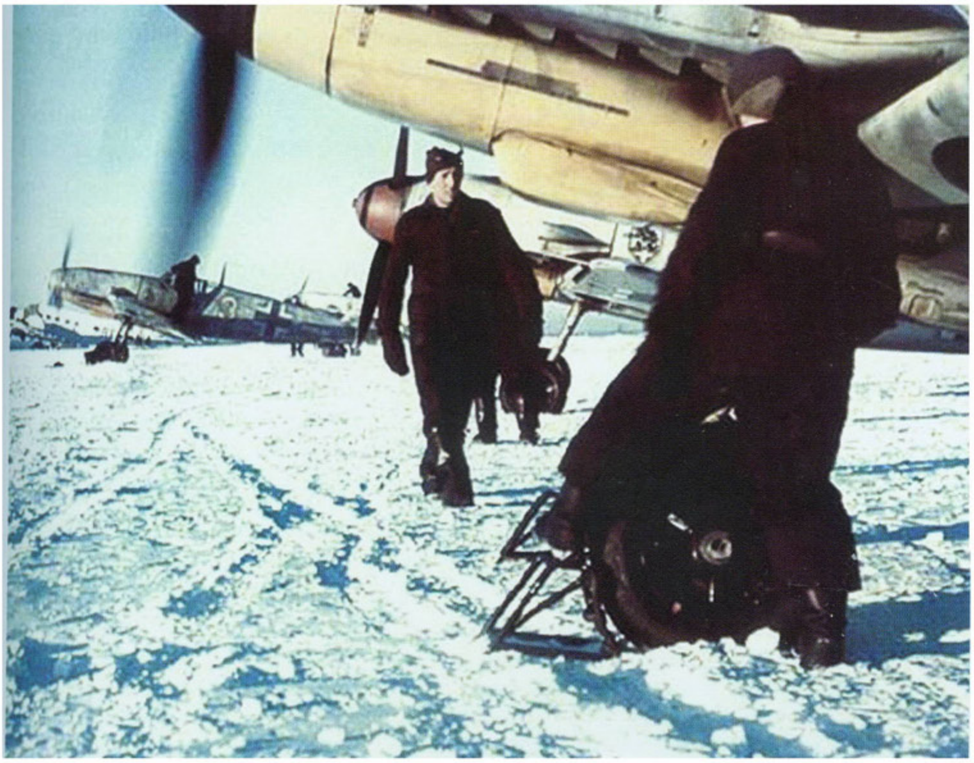


RIGHT: Apparently taken during a combat patrol by II./JG 54, this photograph is believed to show the wingman from a Rotte of 4. Staffel. Despite the dark appearance of the fuselage number and Gruppe bar, these markings are thought to have been white, in accordance with those used by the Staffel, and only appear darker due to the new snow-camouflage contrasting with the grime and weathering collected earlier.



RIGHT: This snow-camouflaged Bf 109 F fitted with a centreline bomb rack was photographed at Siverskaya in early 1942 and was flown by the Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 54, Oblt. Hans-Ekkehard Bob. It was Bob who, in France in 1940, first introduced the devil badge as the Staffel emblem. In this view, the warm air, usually ducted to heat the engine, has been directed into the cockpit.





LEFT: Ground staff warming the engines of Bf 109 Fs of II./JG 54. As frequently observed when operating from snow-covered airfields in Russia, the undercarriage covers have been removed, but less well-documented is the red spinner seen on the machine yet to have its engine started.

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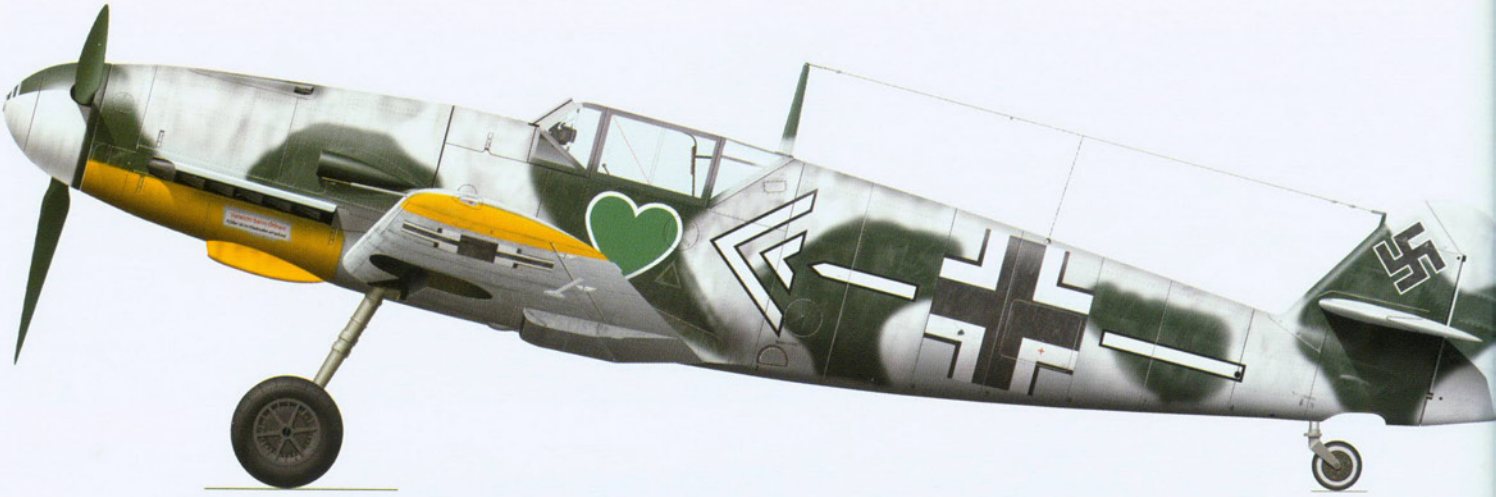
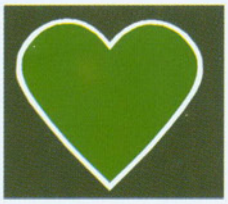
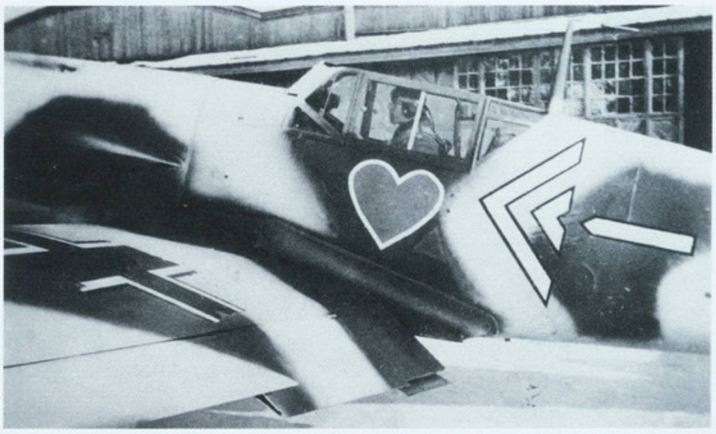


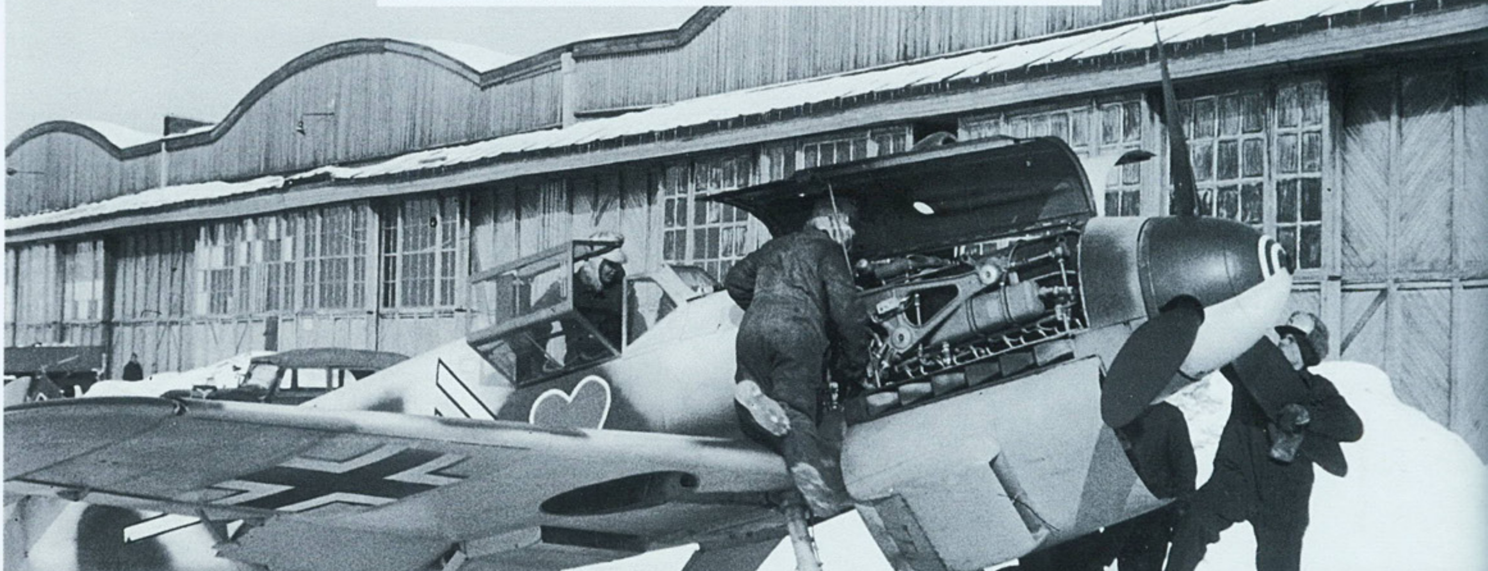
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 flown by Major Hannes Trautloft, Kommodore of JG 54, Relbitsy, March 1942

Originally camouflaged in Schwarzgrün 70 and Dunkelgrün 71 over Lichtblau 76 undersurfaces, Trautloft's machine has received a partial snow camouflage in a temporary white finish. As with almost all other JG 54 aircraft at this time, the Geschwader 'Green Heart' emblem appeared under the cockpit on both sides of the fuselage and the Kommodore's markings, comprising a double chevron and two horizontal bars, were applied in a permanent white with a black outline.

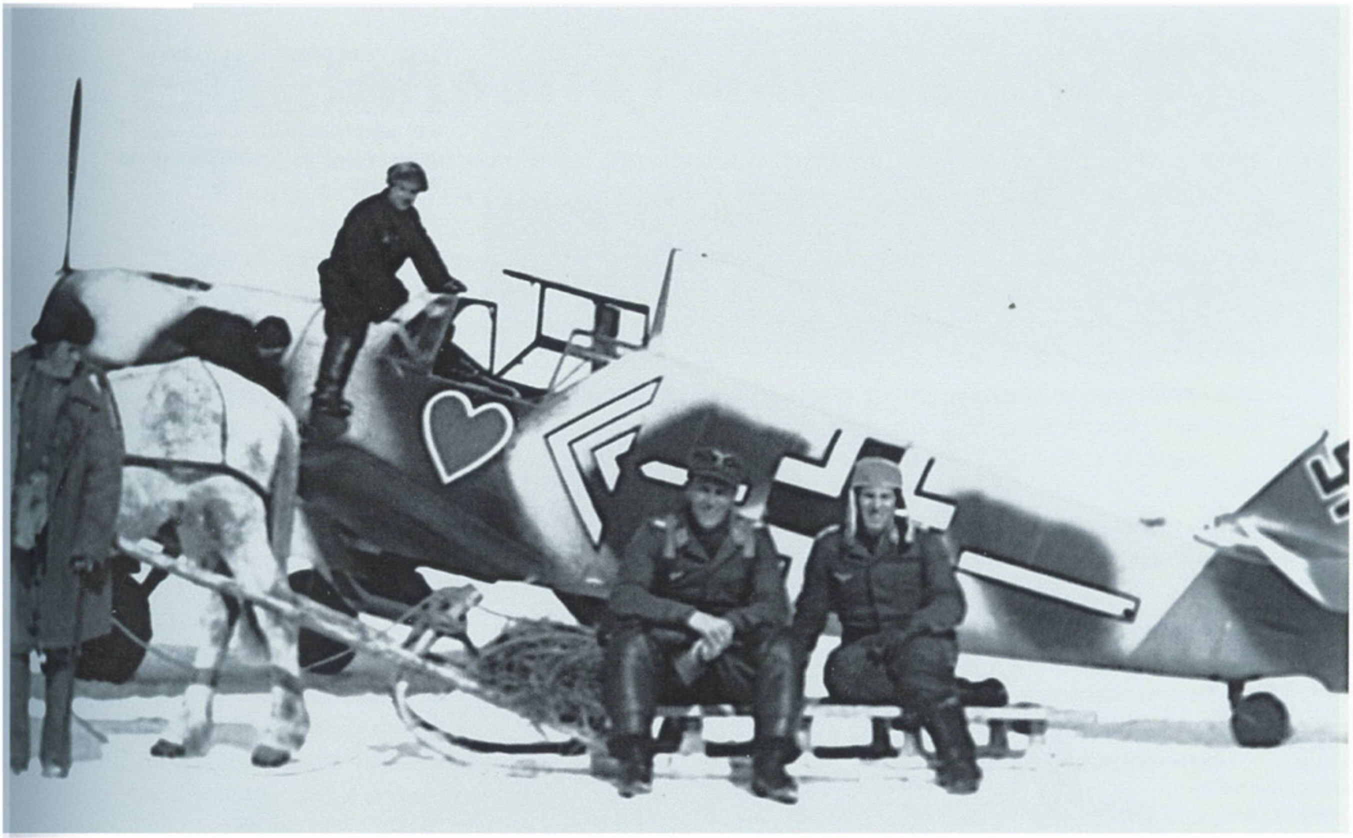


Green Heart badge of JG 54



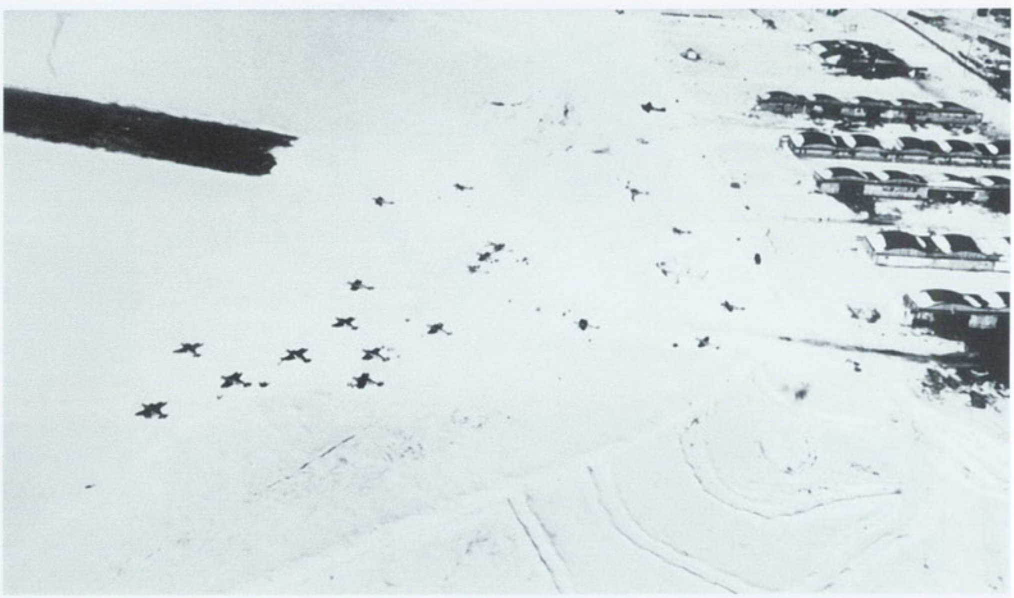


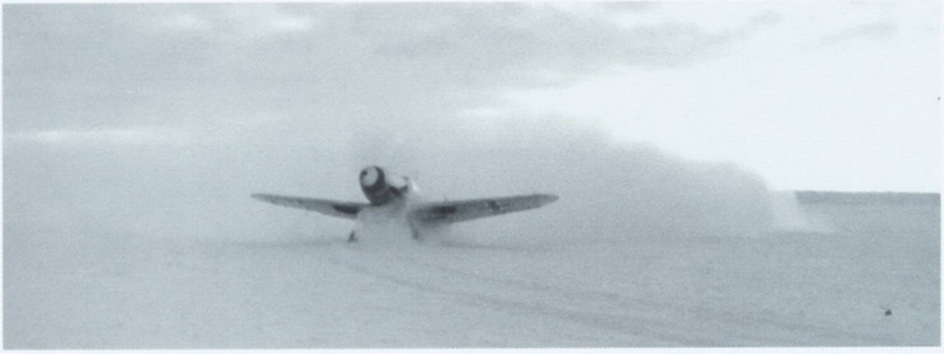
LEFT AND BELOW: Major Trautloft, Kommodore of JG 54, flew several, similarly marked Bf 109 Fs, including th partly snow-camouflaged F-4 which was photographed on the advanced airfield Relbitsy in March 1942.



ABOVE: Trautloft seated on a sleigh, left, with his wingman, Oblt. Otto Kath, beside him. Both pilots survived the war.

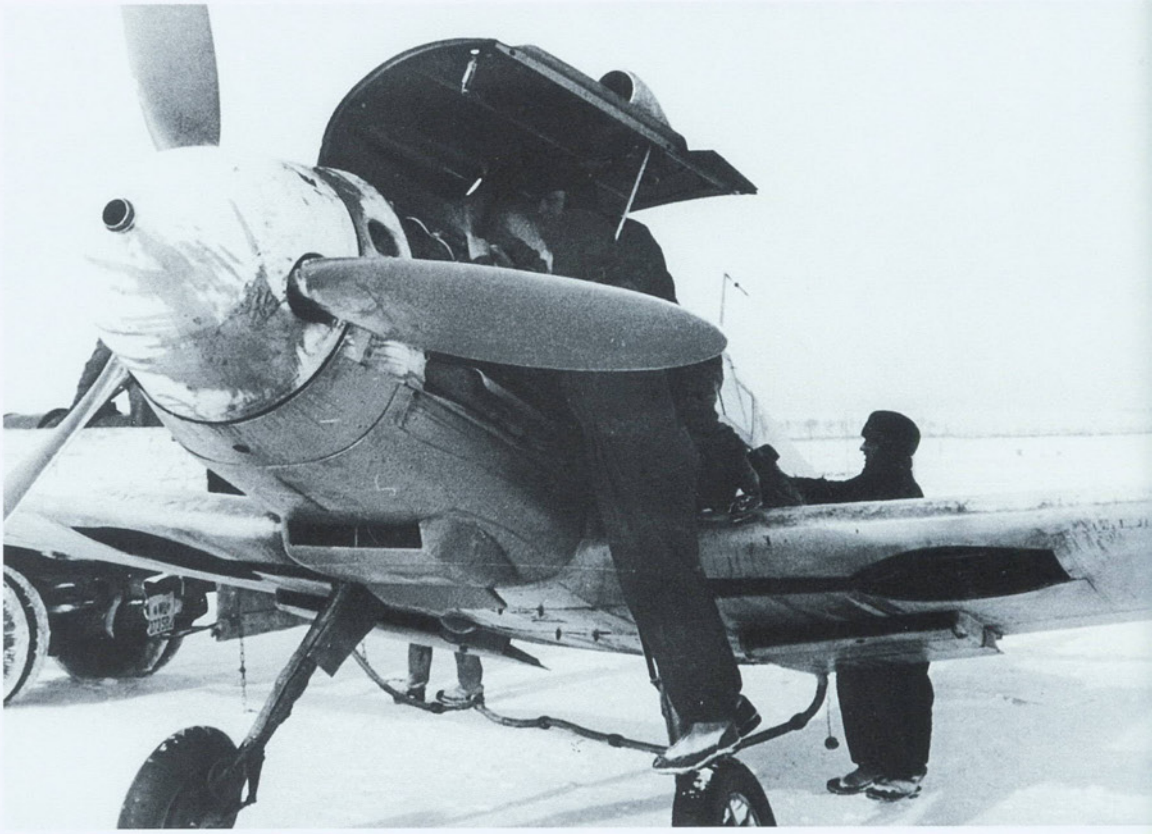
RIGHT, BELOW LEFT AND BELOW RIGHT: The former Soviet aerodrome at Siverskaya was a major air base with heated hangars and full services for men and machines. For many months this base became the home of JG 54 which, due to the facilities and hard runway, remained operational when other airfields closed down due to Winter weather conditions.

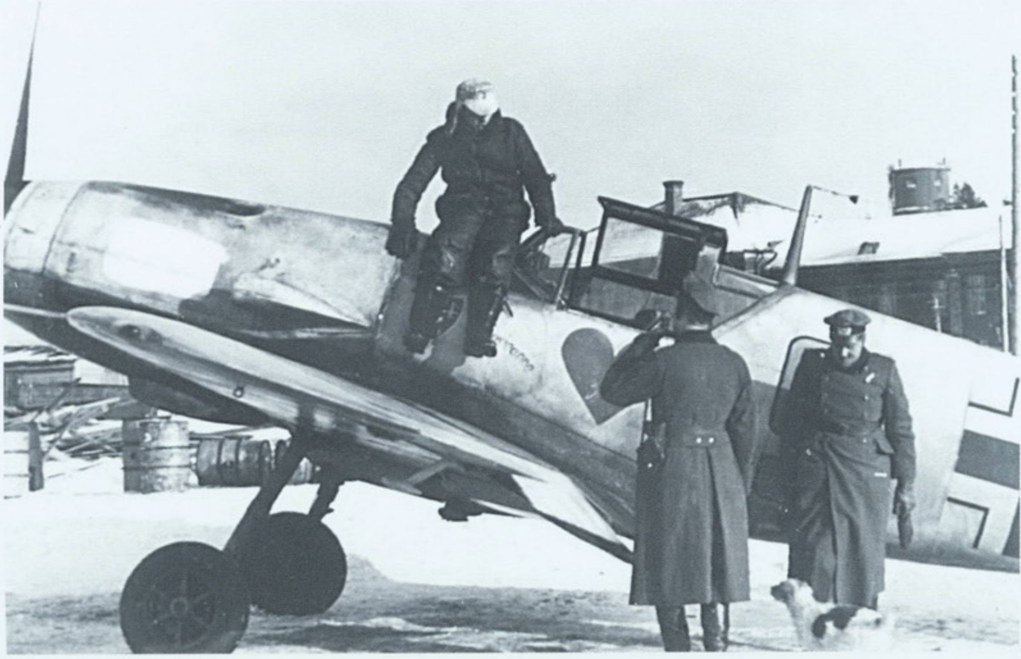




LEFT: A Bf 109 of JG 54 taxiing in loose snow. Note how the propeller has created a small blizzard which will quickly erode the white winter finish around the leading edge of the wing roots.

RIGHT: The effect of this erosion is seen to advantage in this view of ground staff working on a snow-camouflaged Bf 109 F-4 which also shows conspicuous weathering on the spinner and oil-streaks on the engine cowlings. The undersurfaces, normally seen in shadow, have been illuminated by light reflected off the snow which shows the yellow area under the engine particularly well. As frequently seen on aircraft operating in snow, the lower parts of the undercarriage covers have been removed.





LEFT: A side view of a winter-camouflaged Bf 109 F. Note the carbon deposits around the gun troughs on the engine cowling and the exhaust staining over the wing root. The pilot seated on the fuselage is Oblt. Hans-Ekkehard Bob of 9./JG 54. Note that the Staffel's devil's head badge on the nose has been painted out, possibly because it had become too well known to the Soviets who broadcast threats to the 'Teufelsstaffel Bob', as related in Bob's personal account on Page 301.

The Luftwaffe Paralysed

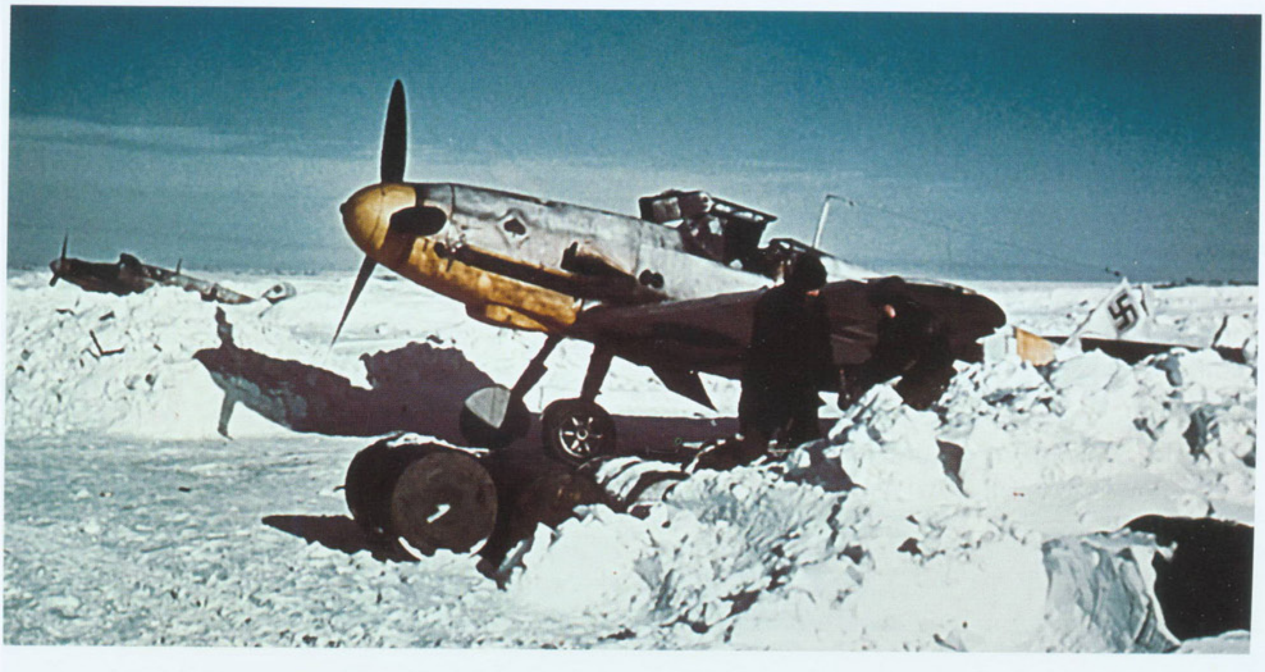
The events during the Soviet Winter offensive of 1941/42 serve to confirm the *Luftwaffe's* important role in the East, for when rain and low clouds prevented the *Luftwaffe* from interfering decisively during the first half of December 1941, the Soviet Army's counteroffensive achieved success. Then, when a ridge of high pressure cleared the skies and new *Luftwaffe* units arrived, the first stage of the Soviet offensive was immediately halted. But the real cold spell of the Winter – the one which made meteorological history – arrived in the new year. On 4 January 1942, temperatures of minus 42°C were measured in the Moscow area and caused the *Wehrmacht* tremendous technical difficulties. Not only did aero engines refuse to start, but an already chaotic supply system collapsed as locomotives froze and, almost instantly, the *Luftwaffe* practically vanished from the skies over the Moscow area. Meanwhile, Soviet aircraft were stationed on well-equipped peacetime air bases around Moscow.

> ***"The railway situation was chaotic. German locomotives were not designed to operate in temperatures of minus 30° C and were to be found on railway tracks almost everywhere, frozen and immobile."***
>
> *Nicolaus von Below, Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant.*

> ***"Huddled close together, we sat in a Heinkel bomber converted to a passenger aircraft. Beneath us the dreary, snow-covered plains of southern Russia flowed by. [...] To keep our direction, we flew along the railway line. Scarcely a train could be seen; the stations were burned out and the servicing sheds destroyed."***
>
> *Albert Speer, later Armaments Minister.*

LEFT: The pilot of this Bf 109 F with its fuselage side badly discoloured with exhaust stains is believed to have been the Geschwaderkommodore of JG 54, Major Hannes Trautloft.

BELOW: Ground crew working on a snow-camouflaged Bf 109 F of JG 53. With its overall white finish, the only areas of colour on this machine are the yellow nose, spinner and rear fuselage band.



BELOW:
Lt. Hans Strelow, Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 51, was the Luftwaffe's most successful pilot during the defensive battles in the area covered by Army Group Centre during the Winter of 1941-1942. He received the Ritterkreuz on 18 March 1942 and the Oak Leaves on the 24th.

After the withdrawal of *Luftflotte* 2 and II. *Fliegerkorps* to the Mediterranean area, air support for Army Group Centre was entrusted to *General* Wolfram *Freiherr* von Richthofen's VIII. *Fliegerkorps*. In early January 1942, the fighter units available to von Richthofen were *Stab,* II., III., and IV./JG 51, plus I. and II./JG 52. On 10 January, these units had available a total of 69 serviceable Bf 109s, but when sub-zero temperatures arrived, the greater part of the available aircraft became forcibly grounded. Under these circumstances, many soldiers of Army Group Centre lost all hope, and after a few weeks of renewed Soviet attacks, resolutely supported by the VVS, resulted in a situation where Army Group Centre was brought close to complete collapse. Utilising the surprise factor, Soviet mobile units infiltrated weakly held sectors and grounded *Luftwaffe* air units frequently had to man trenches in order to fight off such attacks. On one occasion, II./JG 52 lost its adjutant, *Oblt.* Carl Willi Hartmann, in such ground fighting.

Whenever conditions did permit any of VIII. *Fliegerkorps's* fighter aircraft to take off, the situation on the ground was so desperate that they were mainly used to fly fighter-bomber missions. These were not popular because all Soviet soldiers were encouraged to open fire on low-flying German aircraft and the fighter pilots knew only too well that a single small-arms round in the vulnerable cooling system of the Bf 109's liquid-cooled engine was all that was required to bring them down.

All of this had a severe impact on the morale of the German air units and the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 52, *Hptm.* Erich Woitke, was removed from his command and court-martialled for displaying obvious symptoms of demoralisation. Similarly, combat spirits in 7./JG 51 were found to be so low that it had to be disbanded, its pilots being dispersed among other units. Some airmen who were found to have lost their fighting spirit reportedly were transferred to the *Luftwaffe* field divisions, then being established for front-line service on the orders of *Reichsmarschall* Hermann Göring, where they served as ground troops.

While III./JG 51 was almost exclusively flying fighter-bomber missions and filed no claims for aerial victories in January 1942, II./JG 51 was achieving more favourable results and accounted for most of VIII. *Fliegerkorps's* aerial victories during the Soviet winter offensive. Particularly successful was a team from 5./JG 51 comprising *Lt.* Hans Strelow and *Ofw.* Wilhelm Mink. They opened their 1942 successes by claiming five MiG-3s on 4 January

"The field kitchens could not always keep up with the rapid advance..."

RICHARD HAUSMANN, JG 54

On 9 May, 1941, during the Balkan campaign, we were in Stolp-Reitz where we received the Me 109 F. We remained there until 19 June when we moved eastwards to Neuhausen, and the next day moved to Blumenfeld on the Russian-Polish border. At 03.10 hrs on 22 June, we took off for our first mission of the Russian campaign, an attack against the airfield at Ponyevzys in Lithuania. We repeated the attack on the same airfield at 09.36 hrs and we only encountered the Russian *Ratas* (J-16s) later in the day, at about 20.00 hrs.

During the first eight to ten weeks, the weather in the East was hot and dry which made living in tents easier. Our first proper quarters, at Kedainiai in Lithuania, were in the house of a teacher who had left a letter behind which stated that he welcomed us with the hope that Lithuania would be freed from the Soviet yoke. It was there that I saw my first Russian tank, and from the inscription, I determined that it had been manufactured in Chelyabinsk. My first words were, "That's located behind the Urals and we will never get there!"

In Dünaburg we set up our tents on the banks of the Düna River and every morning we were able to take a refreshing bath. The field kitchens could not always keep up with the rapid advance and on many days we were without hot meals. In contrast, the supply of fuel was always good. At the beginning of September the period of good weather came to an end and during the middle of the month the first snows fell. Our tents became uncomfortable and we were glad when on 13 September we transferred to Siverskaya, which was a Russian military air base with permanent buildings. However, the barracks were run-down and the central heating didn't work. Although we had to use primitive iron ovens, this was a luxury compared to the tents. The coming Winter consisted of weeks of temperatures 30 to 40 degrees below zero. It was amazing how our "Black Men" continued to made our aircraft serviceable. A Russian officer, who had deserted and flown over to us, showed us how the Russians kept an airfield operational throughout the Winter and especially during the period of thaw in the Spring. He spoke German very well and he was often our guest in the canteen.

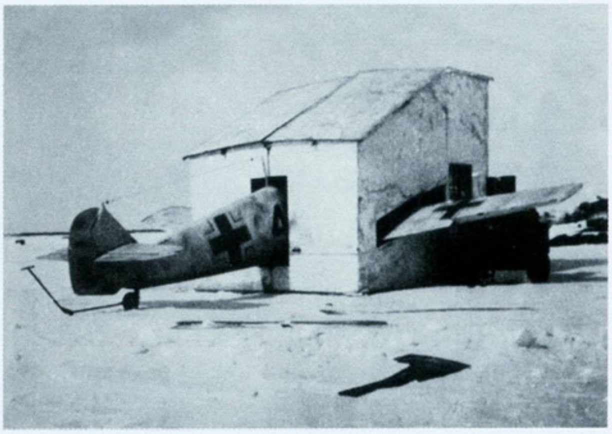
– probably in an engagement with 16 IAP – in which Mink claimed three. Nine days later – when JG 51 lost 28-victory ace *Fw.* Egon Grosse in a weather-related flight accident – Mink claimed a Pe-2 while Strelow destroyed two R-Z biplanes as his 30th and 31st victories. However, these achievements had no influence on the general situation and, on 24 January, Strelow's and Mink's commander, *Oblt.* Hartmann Grasser, was shot down and injured.

With their morale considerably boosted, the VVS airmen now offered more resistance than previously, and the statistics of VVS Western Front for January 1942 show that 4,175 combat sorties were flown that month. At the same time, VVS Western Front recorded a loss of 74 aircraft and claimed to have shot down 34.

The Situation is Saved by the Luftwaffe

The use of 'Alert Boxes' – portable heated shacks erected to prevent aircraft engines from freezing – together with a policy of rotating units between Germany and the East, were two dominant factors in the German revival west of Moscow in February 1942, and VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was able to quadruple the number of sorties it carried out in the first two months of the year. At the same time, VVS regiments moved forward to airstrips abandoned by the Germans, only to find that they were now confronted with extended lines of supply and primitive airfield conditions, exactly as their *Luftwaffe* counterparts previously.

It was in February 1942 that 5./JG 51's *Lt.* Hans Strelow rose to real fame. Born on 26 March 1922, Strelow was only 19 years of age when he achieved his first victory on 25 June 1941. By the turn of the year, Strelow had amassed 27 victories and had earned himself the profound respect of his *Geschwader*, which had now adopted the honour-title *'Jagdgeschwader Mölders'*. On 4 February, Strelow increased his victories to 36 by shooting down four Russian aircraft in one day. From then on, his reputation started to spread beyond *Jagdgeschwader 'Mölders'*. Strelow claimed his 40th victory on 28 February and claimed 4 victories on 6 March, repeating this feat on 17 March. The next day he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* and also shot down seven Soviet aircraft, after which the *Wehrmachtsbericht* mentioned him by name, an honour that previously had been bestowed only upon a few of JG 51's airmen. When he was awarded the *Eichenlaub* on 24 March, his victory score stood at 66.



The use of heated shacks, known as 'Alert Boxes', prevented aircraft engines from freezing and, together with a policy of rotating units between Germany and the East, was a major factor in the revival of German forces in February 1942.

Shortly afterwards, Strelow left for a home leave, by which time Army Group Centre's situation had been stabilised. However, it had sustained tremendous losses in personnel and material from which it would never completely recover, and although irrevocably placed in a defensive position, it had been saved from complete annihilation due mainly to the efforts of the *Luftwaffe*. When the Winter battle ended, JG 52's two *Jagdgruppen* were withdrawn from first-line service, but the remaining fighter units of VIII. *Fliegerkorps – Stab,* II., III. and IV./JG 51 – were in a more favourable situation than three months previously. On 8 April 1942, JG 51 became the first *Jagdgeschwader* to reach 3,000 victories.

Geschwader Trautloft's First Winter in the East

On Army Group Centre's left flank stood Army Group North. Positioned between Lake Ladoga and the area around Lake Ilmen, it was supported from the air by *Luftflotte* 1 with its only air corps, I. *Fliegerkorps.* The fighters in this area were united under the command of *Major* Hannes Trautloft, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 54 and undoubtedly one of the *Jagdwaffe's* best unit commanders. Although JG 54 took the name *'Grünherz'*, or 'Green Heart', after Trautloft's home in Thuringia, the 'Green Heart of Germany', it became known to both friend and foe mainly as *Geschwader Trautloft.*

Trautloft, who took great care to attend to the well-being of every man in his *Geschwader*, arranged for his unit to be billeted in the old palace of the Czar at Krasnogvardeisk (now known as Gatchina). Based on such well-equipped aerodromes as Siverskaya, which had large, heated hangars, JG 54 was not as affected by the cold as JG 51. The VVS units in the area were unable to challenge the convincing air superiority of JG 54's pilots, although a bold attempt was made on 2 January 1942 when five Pe-2s escorted by eight I-16s succeeded in destroying ten aircraft on the ground at Siverskaya. But in the air, Trautloft's men were without peer. That day, 7./JG 54's *Ofw.* Karl-Heinz Kempf shot down five Soviet aircraft in a single mission, including one of the Pe-2s that had raided Siverskaya.

Opposing *Luftflotte* 1 were the air forces of the Volkhov, North-Western and Leningrad Fronts, plus VVS KBF (the Red Banner Baltic Fleet) and Leningrad's air defence unit 7 IAK/PVO, but these were in a sorrowful state because the best units had been withdrawn to the defence of Moscow. The heavy losses inflicted by JG 54 in 1941 were replaced largely with such obsolete biplane trainers and reconnaissance aircraft as U-2s, R-5s and R-Zs converted into bombers. In January 1942, more than half of the approximately 200 serviceable aircraft with VVS Volkhov Front were of these three types.

In the sector immediately to the south of Lake Ilmen, the strength of VVS North-Western Front had plummeted from 1,211 aircraft on the eve of the German attack on 22 June 1941 to an astounding 79 exactly six months later. Nevertheless, the indefatigability of the city of Leningrad was a real nuisance to the Germans and their Finnish ally. A source of embarrassment to *Generaloberst* Alfred Keller – *Luftflotte* 1's commander – was that the powerful Soviet air defence of Leningrad, in particular anti-aircraft artillery, rendered his air fleet incapable of carrying out any effective air attacks against the surrounded city. Instead, he ordered his units to attack the ice road the Soviets had opened over the frozen surface of Lake Ladoga and which allowed lorries to bring supplies to Leningrad. This however changed from 7 January, when the Soviet Volkhov Front launched an offensive against the German lines to the north of Lake Ilmen while the North-Western Front attacked to the south of the lake. These offensives were intensified on 13 January, leading to a narrow but deep penetration into German 18th Army's lines north of Lake Ilmen.

RIGHT: In Winter, most units copied Soviet practice and rolled the runway areas of snow-covered airfields. Rolling quickly compacted the snow to a hard surface and was preferred to clearing the snow because considerably less work was involved, especially when frequent snowfalls were expected. This method had the additional advantage in that the snow camouflage of the airfield remained undisturbed.

During the upsurge in air fighting that followed, VVS Volkhov Front, VVS Leningrad Front and VVS KBF all took heavy losses from JG 54, and among Trautloft's experts the exploits of 3./JG 54's *Oblt.* Max-Hellmuth Ostermann were particularly prominent. Ostermann had already received the *Ritterkreuz* in September 1941, and by the end of the year his score stood at 46. On New Year's Day 1942, a Yak-1 fell as Ostermann's 47th kill, and then another two on 8 January, one on the 9th, and a MiG-3 on the 11th. In the last ten days of January, Ostermann's next victories followed in quick succession: a Yak-1 on 20 January, an I-16 and an Il-2 on 23 January, and another I-16 the next day. On 25 January an MP-1 hydroplane from VVS KBF took off from Priyutino for a courier flight to Novaya Ladoga escorted by two I-153 biplane fighters from 71 IAP/VVS KBF. None of these aircraft reached its destination and all fell prey to *Oblt.* Ostermann's skills. The next day, Ostermann destroyed a Pe-2 and, by adding an I-15 and a MiG-3 to his tally on 28 January, surpassed his 60-victory mark. On the latter date, *Hptm.* Franz Eckerle, Ostermann's *Gruppenkommandeur*, attained his 50th victory and, in total, JG 54 claimed 99 victories against eight combat losses during the first month of 1942.

JG 54's most successful pilot was *Hptm.* Hans Philipp, who returned to 4./JG 54 after home leave in late January 1942. Philipp was already credited with 72 victories, and he opened a new series of successes by shooting up a forced-landed MiG-3 on 2 February. His probable victim was *St.Lt.* Ivan Chulkov, an ace in 41 IAP with nine personal and two shared victories, who was reported missing after a sortie over the Volkhov battlegrounds on that date.

However, the relentless quest for new victories also led many *Jagdflieger* to recklessness. On 13 February, while *Major* Trautloft was away on home leave, JG 54 attained its 1,699th victory. Eager to become the pilot responsible for the *Geschwader's* 1,700th victory, *Hptm.* Franz Eckerle bounced a formation of four I-16s and four I-15*bis* from 71 IAP in the region south of Lake Ladoga on 14 February. In his second attack, at 14.25 hrs, Eckerle managed to shoot down *Serzhant* Aleksey Baranovskiy's I-15*bis* – recorded as the German ace's 59th victory. Immediately afterward, Eckerle's Bf 109F-2, W.Nr. 9728, CH+OP, was hit by bursts of fire from three Soviet aircraft and crashed to the ground. The victory was shared between *M.Lt.* Petrukhin, *M.Lt.* Markov, and *Serzhant* Savosin. Eckerle reportedly baled out but was killed on the ground by Soviet troops. His place as I./JG 54's *Gruppenkommandeur* was taken over by *Hptm.* Hans Philipp.

To the north of Lake Ilmen, the German 18th Army managed to contain Soviet 2nd Assault Army, which eventually became isolated in the so-called Lyuban Pocket, but south of the lake, the North-Western Front succeeded in isolating two German army garrisons, at Demyansk and Kholm.

"I used to call him "Bruchmüller"..."

HANS-EKKEHARD BOB, STAFFELKAPITÄN OF 9./JG 54

When we reached Leningrad, our ground troops entered the suburbs but were prevented from making any further progress by the River Neva running between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga. It was the end of 1941 and we had already seen the first signs of Winter when we had arrived at the major military air base at Siverskaya. The Russians had abandoned the barracks and hangars only as we arrived, so the windows were largely still intact. We were billeted in the former Czar's palace and were able to settle down into quite good accommodation.

It soon became apparent that the fortified city of Leningrad would not easily fall into our hands, so we had to prepare for a long stay in Siverskaya. In total, we spent 16 months there and endured the hard Winter of 1941/42 when temperatures dropped as low as minus 52°C. In such conditions everything froze. Even the heaters used to warm our aircraft engines would not function, so we had to build fires to warm the heaters before they could be started. Only then could we in turn warm our aircraft engines. To avoid this problem, we eventually kept the heaters running day and night.

These extreme climatic conditions did not, however, prevent the Russians from constantly attacking our lines, but by the time our infantry had raised the alarm and we had taken off and flown to the combat area, the enemy's armoured IL-2s had already disappeared. For this reason, it was decided that my *Staffel* would move to a well-camouflaged airstrip only two kilometres from the front and, that way, we were able to see the ground-attack aircraft approaching. We then scrambled and caught them completely by surprise. On one of the first occasions, everything happened so fast that I attacked and shot down a Russian aircraft even before my undercarriage had retracted. Soon, the infantry on both sides had become aware of this exploit and I achieved a certain fame. Even the Russian radio broadcast such threats as, "*Sooner or later the Captain of the Teufelsstaffel Bob will be shot down by our forces.*" Unfortunately for them, they never succeeded.

The Russians were more fortunate in the Demyansk area in January 1942 when they were able to surround some 100,000 men of our 16th Army and the *Luftwaffe* had to supply them. In the pocket, our comrades had built a small airfield and our fighters landed and took off throughout the day. Our task was to secure the airspace in the area and in this we were quite successful.

In my *Staffel*, I had a good pilot called Müller; *Feldwebel* Müller. [1] I used to call him "Bruchmüller" (Breakmüller) because he often damaged his aircraft in bad landings. No matter how many aircraft he damaged though, his claims were always one ahead, and at that time he had 11 claims and had damaged ten of our own machines. This theatre of operations presented a good opportunity to push Müller a bit, so I said to him, "*Dear Müller, I don't want you to damage any more machines. If it happens again then you will stay in the pocket and the infantry can have you!*" From that day onwards, all Müller's landings were excellent!

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[1] This was probably Siegfried Müller, killed in action on 21 February 1945 when an *Oberfeldwebel.*

Protecting the Demyansk and Kholm Airlifts

Holding Demyansk and Kholm was a cornerstone of German 16th Army's strategy in the sector south of Lake Ilmen, for once the Spring thaw set in, the Soviet Army would encounter severe supply problems in this area all the while these two communications centres remained in German hands. Hence, the Germans hastily organised an air bridge to provide these two strongholds with supplies, but with most of JG 54 concentrated north of Lake Ilmen, *Major* Trautloft stationed only 9./JG 54 and I./JG 51 – the latter subordinated to JG 54 - to the south. Although these two units had a mere eight serviceable Bf 109s apiece, they were more than sufficient because of the weakness of VVS North-Western Front: in January 1942, 32 of the 79 aircraft available to the Soviets were lost in combat, and in the period between 20 January and 16 February, although *Oblt.* Hans-Ekkehard Bob, *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 54, logged 23 combat missions in this area, only once did he encounter any Soviet aircraft.

"There was a loud bang and the propeller stopped."

HANS SCHMOLLER-HALDY, JG 54

In an earlier section, [1] I recalled that when the French campaign began, we had 12 pilots but that after six weeks of operations over England, I had only *Lt.* Adolf Kitzinger left when what remained of my *Staffel* , 3./JG 54, was transferred to Jever. Subsequently, Kitzinger was appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 1./JG 54 but he was killed on 27 June 1941, only five days after the launch of Operation *'Barbarossa'*. This loss was a severe blow for me as there was now not a single one left of the comrades I had known just a year earlier. Kitzinger went down vertically near Memel. I don't know the cause of his crash but the Me 109 *'Friedrich'* had some severe problems with the DB 601 engine, including cracked pistons. This, of course, made the pilots extremely nervous.

During 1941 I kept losses in my *Staffel* to a relatively low level so that, by the end of the year, almost half the number of men who started the Russian campaign had already been lost!

1942 began with temperatures of 45°C below zero and, on 2 January, there was a heavy Russian air raid on our airfield at Siverskaya. Several Me 109s of JG 54, mainly belonging to the III. *Gruppe*, were destroyed. Another hard blow was the loss, on 14 February, of our new *Kommandeur*, *Hptm.* Franz Eckerle. He was posted missing in the area of Voronovo. His successor, who came from II. *Gruppe*, was the very successful *Hptm.* Hans 'Fips' Philipp.

On 23 February 1942, during my 320th operational mission, it was my turn. I had carried out a low-level attack south of Leningrad and although there was no return fire, suddenly, as I was pulling up, there was a loud bang and the propeller stopped. My momentum carried me forward another 600 metres, but below me there was a huge expanse of forest. Fortunately, there was a bare strip of land 600 metres long and 40 metres wide where I carried out a belly-landing. [2] Equally fortunately, this area was behind the German lines but it was near a Russian railway line.

I was not injured but it was cold, so I started walking through the forest which was eerily silent. At about 21.00 hrs I heard a noise and saw three German soldiers preparing to carrying out a raid on the railway line. I was taken to 18. Army headquarters which was located in a large house. A *General* with the *Ritterkreuz* came to me and saw my sloppy appearance and unshaven face and said, "*Luftwaffe*, naturally!" He asked me if I could play cards and we played several hands that evening.

I was taken back to Germany in a Red Cross Ju 52 ambulance aircraft. Some time later, I received a call from Galland's Headquarters asking me to join him and, as I no longer had any desire to return to the front, I agreed.

Even though we had problems with the engine, the Me 109 was a delight to fly, just like the Spitfire which I had also flown once. The engine was quiet and strong. I will never forget that aeroplane.

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[1] See Volume 2, Page 343.

[2] The location was Chudovo and the Bf 109 F-2 was 80% destroyed.

However, in mid-February, this period of relative quiet ended, and at approximately the same time III./JG 3 arrived in the sector after resting and refitting in Germany. The men of this *Jagdgruppe*, the first of JG 3 to return to the Eastern Front after this *Geschwader* had received the honour- title *Jagdgeschwader 'Udet'*, soon found that they had little use for the briefing they received from 9./JG 54, which they replaced. Being unable to crush the Demyansk and Kholm strongholds, the Soviets decided to concentrate on severing their airborne flow of supplies. To complete this task, VVS North-Western Front received substantial reinforcements, although the pilots of III./JG 3 *'Udet'* and I./JG 51 *'Mölders'* thought that the Soviets had built up their battered VVS Front with only inadequately trained novice pilots with poor flying skills, for between 18 February and 18 March, III./JG 3 alone was able to chalk up 81 victories for only three combat losses. In the same period, I./JG 51 lost not a single aircraft but, nevertheless, between 22 February and 10 March some 39 Ju 52s were destroyed.

On 20 March, *Stab* and II./JG 54 moved to Relbitsy aerodrome to complete the task of supporting the German Army's attempt to relieve the Demyansk garrison, known as Operation *'Brückenkopf'*. The Soviets in turn countered by bringing to the area a number of more-experienced airmen and flying units, and German pilots soon noticed an improvement in Soviet aerial opposition. *Oblt.* Wolfgang Späte, one of II./JG 54's best aces, shot down a MiG-3 and a lend-lease Curtiss P-40 on 26 March, but in return the Soviet fighters shot down one of II./JG 54's Bf 109s. Two days later, III./JG 3 lost 47-victory ace *Lt.* Eckhardt Hübner and his wingman, 17-victory ace *Fw.* Rudolf Berg, during a *freie Jagd* mission near Demyansk.

> ***"We engage a group of I-18s that intercept our dive-bombers. Other Me 109s join in the fight, and a stiff turning combat develops. Twice I tried to attack an I-18 from behind, but on both occasions I am myself attacked by another Russian who forces me to disengage. Suddenly I hear the voice of our Geschwader Adjutant, Hptm. Otto Kath, over the R/T: 'Oil temperature 120 degrees, I'll have to make a forced-landing!'"***
>
> *Major Trautloft's description of an engagement, 28 March, 1942.*

More successful were I. and III./JG 54, operating to the north of Lake Ilmen, and on 29 March, *Hptm.* Hans Philipp reported his 98th victory and *Oblt.* Ostermann his 80th. The next day, Trautloft and his wingman were forced to flee into a layer of clouds in order to escape an attack by six MiG-3s. One consolation for Trautloft was the report that *Hptm.* Hans Philipp – I./JG 54's *Gruppenkommandeur* – achieved his 99th and 100th victories on the last day of March. In all, the fighter units under Trautloft's command claimed 359 aerial victories in March 1942 for the loss of 15 Bf 109s in combat.

In April, the fighting over the sector immediately to the south of Lake Ilmen intensified. By this time, German transport aircraft flying in supplies to Demyansk and Kholm operated only in tight formations protected by Bf 109s, and this dramatically reduced their losses. In addition, the Germans obtained further good results by means of their *freie Jagd* tactics. While VVS North-Western Front registered 168 combat losses (including 114 fighters) in April 1942, III./JG 3, I./JG 51 and II./JG 54 lost only eight Bf 109s in combat. After attaining the *Gruppe's* 700th victory on 6 April, III./JG 3 returned to Germany.

Further north, in the Leningrad area, *Ofw.* Rudolf Klemm scored JG 54's 2,000th victory by destroying a Pe-2 at 10.42 hrs on 4 April and the next JG 54 pilot to reach the 100-victory mark was *Oblt.* Max-Hellmuth Ostermann, who completed this feat on 12 May. By that time, a land corridor to the Demyansk garrison had been opened and the bulk of both the *Jagdgruppen* and the transport units could be transferred to other sectors.

RIGHT AND BELOW RIGHT: In February 1942, it soon became evident that German forces cut off at Kholm and Demyansk would have to be supplied by air if they were to last out until relief was possible. The long air supply operation to these pockets was the first of its kind ever carried out and it kept the trapped troops fighting until relieved by a German counterattack in May. For supply flights to Kholm and Demyansk, fighter escort for the transport aircraft usually amounted to two Schwärme. This Rotte of Bf 109 Fs (*RIGHT*) from I./JG 51, flew escort missions for transport aircraft in February 1942 while (*BELOW RIGHT*) these aircraft from 2./JG 51 were employed for airfield defence in March. Because of the great difference in speed between the fighter and transport aircraft, no attempt was made to organise close escort. Instead, arrangements were made to have the transports met by the fighters at a certain time and pre-determined altitude. The fighters would then provide air cover while the transports were in the encircled area and accompany them back to their own territory. Co-operation between transports and fighters was excellent and, because the slow transports were an attractive target for Russian fighters, escort duty was popular and the Bf 109 pilots were able to chalk up a number of successes. However, with only two to ten Bf 109s available, the number of fighter aircraft available was insufficient to guarantee effective protection. The Demyansk-Kholm air supply operation, although superficially successful, created a dangerous precedent for future Luftwaffe planning and, when the Sixth Army became surrounded at Stalingrad in November, greatly influenced the decision to supply it in a similar manner.

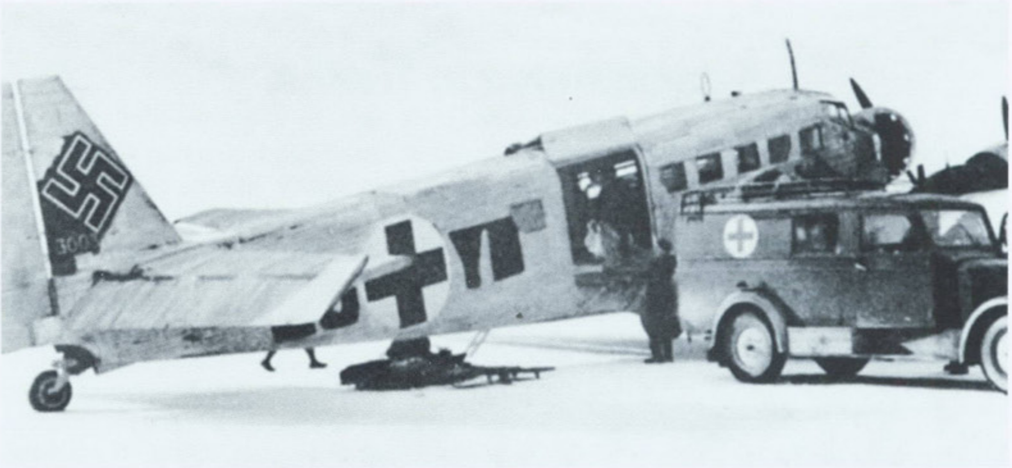
RIGHT: For Luftwaffe air transport operations, units were assembled as required using aircraft drawn from the flying schools, and in this photograph, weapons and ammunition are seen being unloaded from a Ju 52/3m belonging to Flugzeugführerschule (C) 16. During the early phase of the Demyansk airlift, temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees C caused initial technical difficulties, but throughout the period of operations it was possible to maintain readiness at between 50 and 80 per cent. One advantage of the extreme cold was that firm runways of frozen, hard-packed snow were available whereas, in later phases of the operation, mud became a severe problem and upset carefully devised timetables for aircraft landing and taking off.

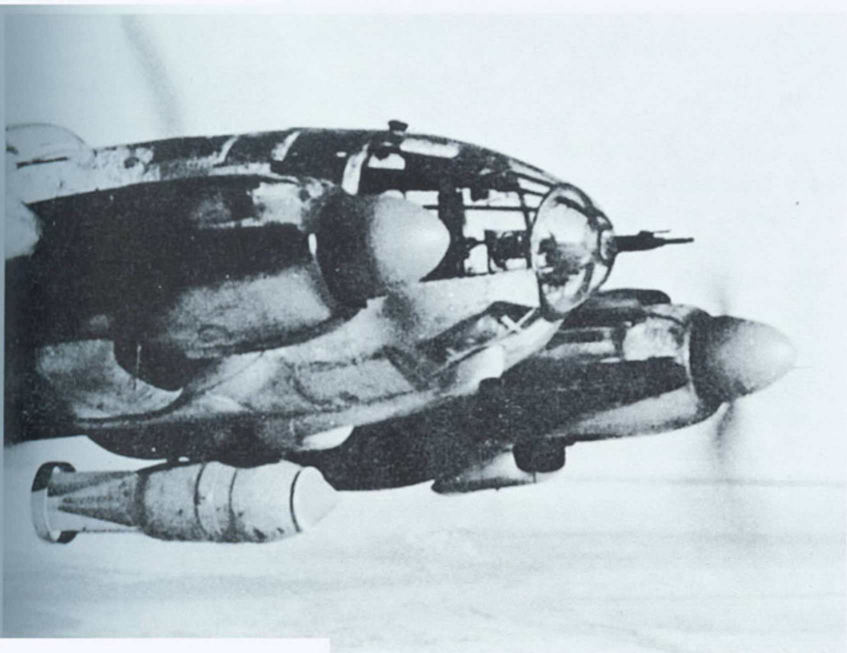
ABOVE: The supply operation to the encircled German troops at Demyansk was commanded from 19 February to 19 May 1942 by Oberst Fritz Morzig, Officer Commanding Air Transport.

RIGHT AND BELOW: A total of 32,427 missions was flown by the transport units into Demyansk, during which 64,844 tons of material, equipment, ammunition, weapons, spare parts, fuel, clothing, foodstuffs, medical supplies, mail and miscellaneous supplies were airlifted in. Kholm was at first supplied by Ju 32/3ms which landed under fire to unload, but when Soviet artillery fire increased, supply operations were taken over by the He 111s of KG 4 which air-dropped their cargoes. Freight gliders were also employed at Kholm.

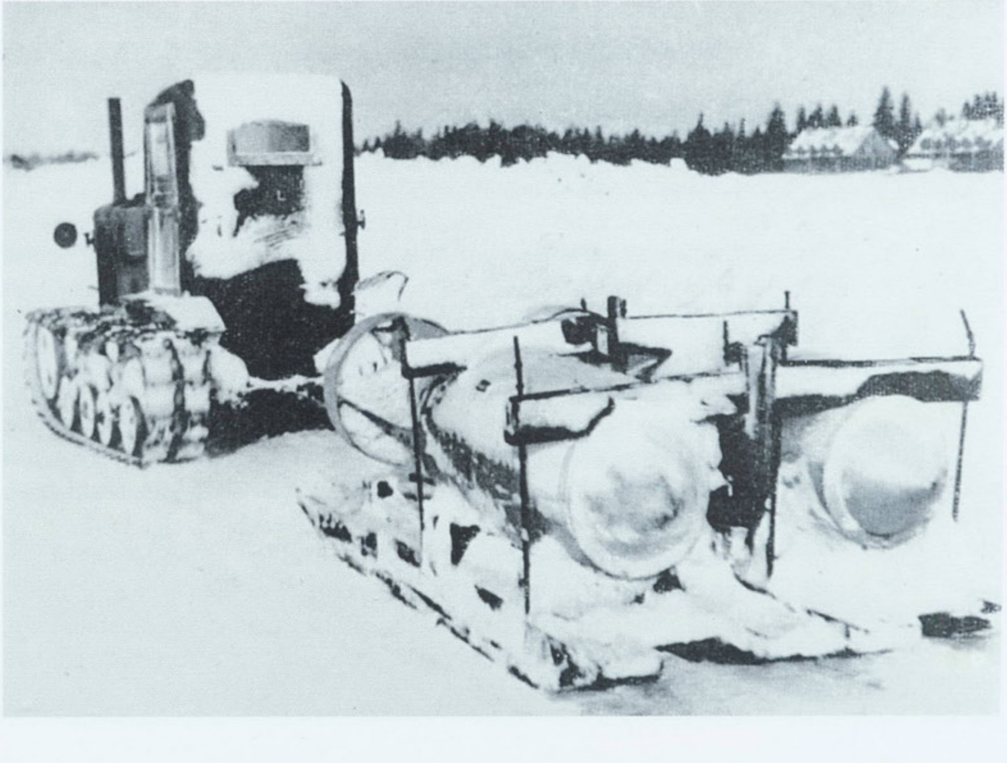
BELOW: Many Ju 52/3ms were employed on ambulance duties in order ferry out wounded soldiers from Soviet encirclement. Here, wounded flown from the pocket are being unloaded onto a horse-drawn sledge.

RIGHT: This Ju 52/3m ambulance aircraft has been re-painted in a temporary white Winter camouflage which has been carefully applied in order to avoid obscuring the original markings. The Hakenkreuz on the tail has been retained but the Balkenkreuze on the fuselage sides and wings have been replaced by large red crosses on a white disc.





ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: The Soviets realised that if they could capture the airfields at Demyansk and Kholm, the pockets would be completely isolated. Luftwaffe bomber units therefore flew missions to support German ground troops holding the outer defence perimeters. Here He 111s drop SC 1000 bombs.



RIGHT: When frozen snow covered the ground, various means of transport were adopted. Here, a pair of SC 1000 bombs have been loaded onto a purpose-built sledge which is being towed by a tracked tug.

January-October 1942

A Jagdgruppe in Trouble

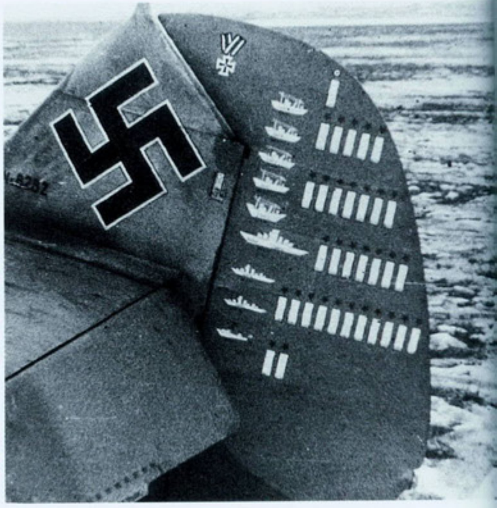
Due to a combination of heavy losses in 1941 and the need to concentrate the best equipment in the defence of the capital, Soviet air opposition to German Army Group South and *Luftflotte* 4 in the eastern Ukraine – VVS South-Western and VVS Southern Fronts, each with around 200 aircraft – was made up mainly of older aircraft types such as the I-16 fighter. Interestingly, this is in complete contrast to the situation prior to the German attack in June 1941, when this region possessed a larger proportion of modern aircraft than any other sector.

Generaloberst Alexander Löhr, commander of *Luftflotte* 4, had three fighter units at his disposal: III./JG 52 at Kharkov-Rogan in the north, I.(*J*)/LG 2 (later redesignated I./JG 77) at Mariupol, west of Rostov, and III./JG 77 on the Crimean Peninsula. Because of adverse weather and the numerical weakness of the VVS in the region, these *Jagdgruppen* had little contact with the enemy, but when they were encountered, the Germans noted that compared to those in the Ukraine, those in the Crimea showed greater skill and combat spirit, so that in January, III./JG 77 recorded only 2.7 victories per combat loss in the air, a ratio far below the average for the *Jagdgruppen* in the East.

The war in the Crimea flared up in late February when the new Soviet Crimean Front – which had established a foothold after landing in the Peninsula's eastern region in late December 1941 – launched an offensive aimed at relieving the surrounded Sevastopol and ousting the Germans from the Crimea. Again the results of air action between III./JG 77 and the Soviet airmen show that III./JG 77 recorded three Bf 109s crash-landed or shot down against a single victory on 4 March, and when they compared their own hard-earned victories with those of other *Luftwaffe* fighter units in the East, the pilots of III./JG 77 felt all but encouraged. Typically, when *Oblt.* Wolfdieter Huy achieved the *Gruppe's* 600th victory on 11 March, he was himself badly injured, and although a series of air combats on 16 March resulted in 10 victory claims for III./JG 77, again three of its Bf 109s were shot down. After this, III./JG 77 was relieved of first-line service and returned to Germany for a period of rest.

BELOW:
Ritterkreuzträger Obt. Wolfdieter Huy, Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 77, flew in the Crimea in early 1942 until posted to North Africa in the late Summer.

BELOW:
The rudder of
Wolfdieter Hu
Bf 109 F-2,
W.Nr. 8282,
recording the
award of the
Ritterkreuz
(on 5 July 194
and his tally of
ships sunk or
damaged up to
15 January 194



A Reversal of Fortunes

Replacing III./JG 77 was II./JG 77 which had exchanged its Bf 109 Es for new Bf 109 F-4s during a three-month period of rest and refit in Germany. Led by *Hptm.* Anton Mader, an extremely able unit commander, the pilots of this *Jagdgruppe* immediately set about striking a more favourable balance and indeed made an impressive start, shooting down 21 Soviet aircraft for no losses on 19 March. Four days later, a group of Mader's pilots pounced on a formation of 247 IAP Yak-1s and shot down two, killing 21-victory ace *Mayor* Mikhail Fedoseyev, at that time one of the top-scoring Soviet aces. For some reason, II./JG 77 managed to achieve a far better victory-to-loss ratio than the *Geschwader's* III. Gruppe, attaining in a ten-day period 60 victories against four combat losses.

Together with the failure of the Crimean Front to achieve any breakthrough, the loss of such a legendary ace as Fedoseyev was a hard blow for the Soviets in the Crimea, but instead of having a demoralising effect, this seemed to spur their airmen to even greater efforts. This was noticed by II./JG 77, which sustained two Bf 109s shot down in air combat against only one victory on 30 March, and another two Bf 109s shot down on 3 April, this time without any successes of their own. A strong Soviet bomber attack against Sarabuz aerodrome on the night of 4/5 April also dealt II./JG 77 some material losses, but the worst setback occurred on 6 April, when 42-victory ace *Ofw.* Rudolf Schmidt was shot down and killed by a Naval 40 BAP Pe-2.

Meanwhile, Spring arrived in the Ukraine and all became quiet along the Ukrainian front for now came the thaws and the infamous *rasputitza*, the seemingly bottomless slush and mud created by the melting snow. Thus, for III./JG 52, operating against VVS South-Western Front, most of April went by without many encounters with the enemy and in a four-week period in April, the entire III./JG 52

Continued on Page 315

"I had landed on a road full of enemy forces..."

Helmut Lohoff, JG 51

I was born in 1915 and later became a passionate glider pilot. I enlisted in the *Wehrmacht* in 1936 and volunteered to become an officer as I thought this offered the best opportunity to continue my flying. After attending the *Luftkriegsschulen* at Wildpark-Werder and Berlin-Gatow, I was posted to IV./JG 132 *'Richthofen'* where I joined the 12. *Staffel* under the famous *Oblt.* Hannes Trautloft. Our *Gruppe*, known as *"Wanderzirkus Jänke"* after the name of our *Kommandeur, Hptm.* Johannes Janke, who had formerly trained at the German base at Lipezk in Russia, was soon renamed IV./JG 51. I made a claim during the French campaign but was soon transferred to serve as an instructor with *Jagdfliegerschule* 2 in Zerbst.

In August 1941, I returned to the front, this time being posted to the 9./JG 51 in Russia. I often flew with the excellent *Ofw.* Edmund Wagner and I had not been there long when I claimed my second victory, a *Rata*. On 27 October 1941, *Oblt.* Herbert Wehnelt, *Staffelkapitän* of 7./JG 51 was wounded and I was transferred from my 9. *Staffel* to take over his *Staffel*. Unfortunately, my friend Wagner did not survive for very long after my departure and was killed on 13 November.

At the beginning of 1942, the year of the planned *Endsieg,* or final victory, our *Gruppe* was based on a field airstrip at Dugino. Soon, my *Staffel* transferred to Vyazma where conditions were appalling. There was ice and snow everywhere, as well as a bad landing strip, and in spite of the fog, snow and high winds, we had to take off daily, mainly to intercept Russian transport aircraft and gliders which were trying to reinforce the sector east of Gzhatsk. They were escorted by *Ratas* and the fighting occurred mainly under 1,000 metres. We orientated ourselves by following the direction of the tracks left by our vehicles which were now retreating from Moscow.

We only stayed at Vyazma for a month before returning to Dugino because conditions were too difficult for us. We were continually waiting for material, spares for our Bf 109, fuel, etc. I expended a great deal of energy phoning my superiors and going to the railway station in the hope of receiving some supplies, but all I saw were large convoys over-full with our wounded who were being transferred to the West. It was a miserable sight.

In the early hours of 11 February 1942, there were eight pilots from my *Staffel* in our operations room, waiting for a break in the weather so that we could take off on another mission. Among others, there was *Ofw.* Bielefeld and the newly arrived *Uffz.* Günther Schack who would later become a great ace. In an attempt to keep warm we had wrapped ourselves in pieces of white cloth, but it was practically impossible. Our only visible military insignia was on our *Schirmmützen*, our peaked field caps, which were almost the only parts of our uniform which could be seen and, because of the side pieces which could be unbuttoned and brought down over our ears, helped to help keep us warm. Under the white cloth, all the other parts of our uniform were for Summer wear and it was really depressing to realise that no preparations had been made for a Winter war. We wondered what future was in store for us if there had evidently been no long-term planning.

At about 11.00 hrs the weather showed signs of an improvement and I decided to take off, my six machines making their take-off run in the snow blown back by those ahead. We reformed over the airfield, set course for the north-west and climbed to 2,500 metres. There we discovered a fantastic blue sky and splendid sunshine, which was a tremendous boost to our morale. With my *Kaczmarek*, *Uffz.* Schack, at my side, we flew for about 30 minutes on a *freie Jagd*, searching for targets, but there was nothing and I was just thinking about changing our mission to a ground-attack operation in the Subzow area, where an *SS Kavallerie Brigade* under the command of *SS-Gruppenführer* Hermann Fegelein was in a very bad situation, when we saw some small black specks in the distance. As we flew closer, we counted 17 Pe-2s flying in two formations. Apparently, they had already released their bombs. I radioed my orders: *"Möbelwagen in 11, angreifen!"*.

While we were manoeuvring to bring ourselves closer, we realised that the two enemy formations had seen us for they came together so that they could better protect each other, and as we closed with them we received several bursts of defensive fire. Soon, each one of us had selected his target and we began the attack. As soon as I opened fire, the Pe-2 I had selected went into a steep dive, which put him in the best position for me. I followed him down and gave him one long burst. I saw hits in the areas of the rudder and the wings and black smoke poured from his left engine, but all the time the rear gunner fired at me continuously. I concentrated my fire on him and the second engine. It lasted a few minutes but I finally downed my 14th victory.

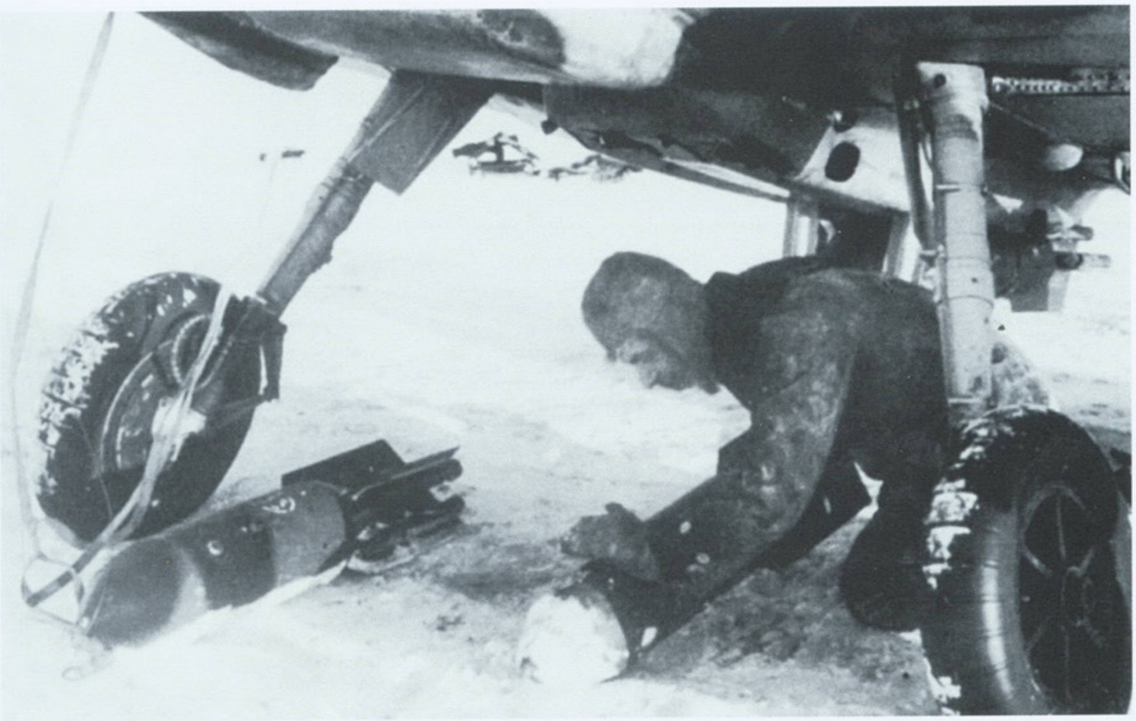
As I began to look around for my comrades, I noticed that my engine did not sound normal. There was a kind of metallic sound and I realised that it had been hit and that my brave Bf 109 would not be able to take me home. This came as a terrible shock. I thought that I was living my last minutes, that this was the end of my life as an officer; an end to my passion for flying and the many months I had spent fighting for my country. I was about 30 km south-west of Rzhev and I informed my pilots over the radio that I was going to make an emergency landing.

My situation was incredibly bad. I was far from my own lines with streets full of Red Army soldiers below and with no equipment which would allow me to escape and survive in masses of snow and temperatures of -50°C. However, I banished these negative thoughts from my mind and concentrated on the landing. I avoided one or two obstacles and landed my 'White 3' on its belly. Once I had slid to a standstill, my first impression was of the complete silence. I released my belts, undid the parachute, pulled out the radio cable and opened the canopy. As soon as I stepped down into the snow I heard cries and bursts of gunfire aimed in my direction. The Russians were already there. I had landed on a road full of enemy forces and was captured.

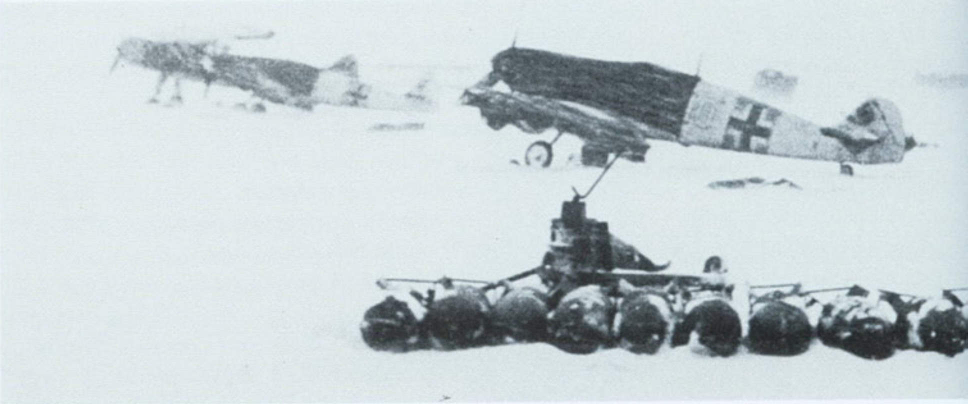
By the afternoon I was already under guard and in jail. Overhead, I heard the familiar sound of Bf 109 engines. Probably my comrades were looking for me. It was hard to bear, hearing my friends, free and so close, but to be unable to contact them.

And so began my seven and a half years of confinement in terrible conditions. It was to be my hardest battle, but I survived and lived through it to win my liberty again.

January-October 1942



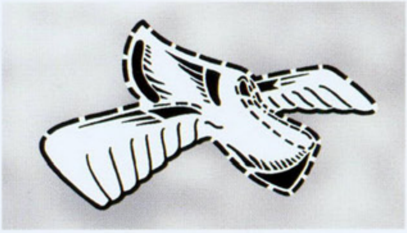
LEFT: The Luftwaffe placed great emphasis on aerial victories and fighter pilots with high scores were rewarded with decorations, promotion, and publicity in newsreels and newspapers. In contrast, any successes achieved during direct intervention in ground battles through strafing or other ground-attack sorties were largely neglected. This photograph shows a Luftwaffe armourer loading SC 50 bombs beneath a Bf 109 F. The centreline rack could hold four of these weapons and, as may be seen in this photograph, cardboard whistles have been attached to the bombs' tailfins.



BELOW AND RIGHT: A bombed-up Bf 109 of JG 54 (*BELOW*) already loaded with four SC 50 bombs and (*RIGHT*), more 'Green Heart' aircraft, each loaded with a single SC 250.

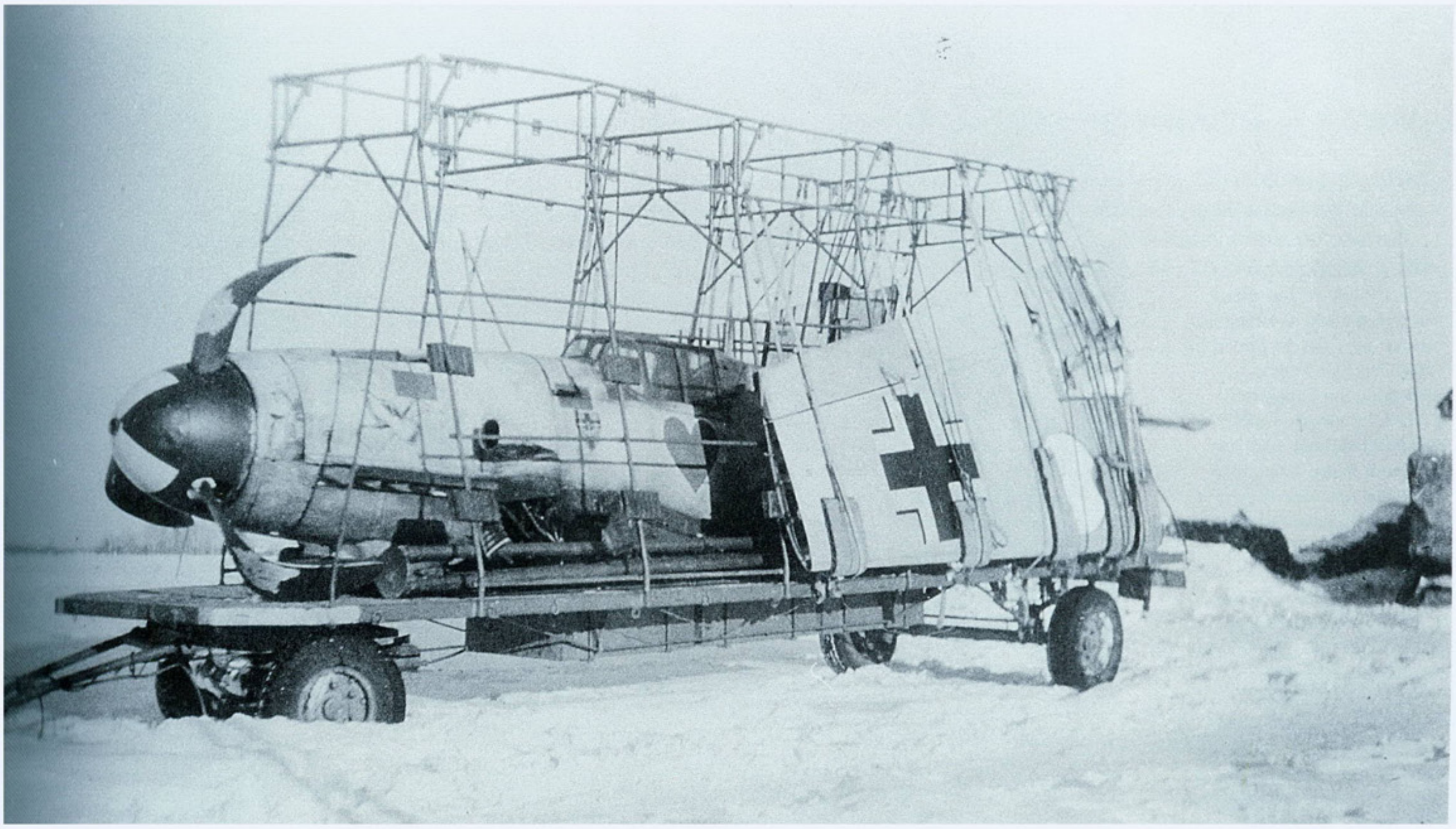
BELOW: Ritterkreuzträger Hptm. Franz Eckerle, an acclaimed stunt pilot, was placed in command of I./JG 54 in November 1941, but his tenure as Kommandeur was short-lived. On 14 February 1942, his aircraft was shot down by Soviet aircraft and crashed to the ground. With a final total of around 60 victories, Eckerle was awarded the Oak Leaves in absentia on 12 March 1942.

ABOVE: Ofw. Karl Kempf of 7./JG 54 distinguished himself on 4 February 1942 when he shot down five Soviet aircraft. On 4 February, with 41 victories, Kempf received the Ritterkreuz.

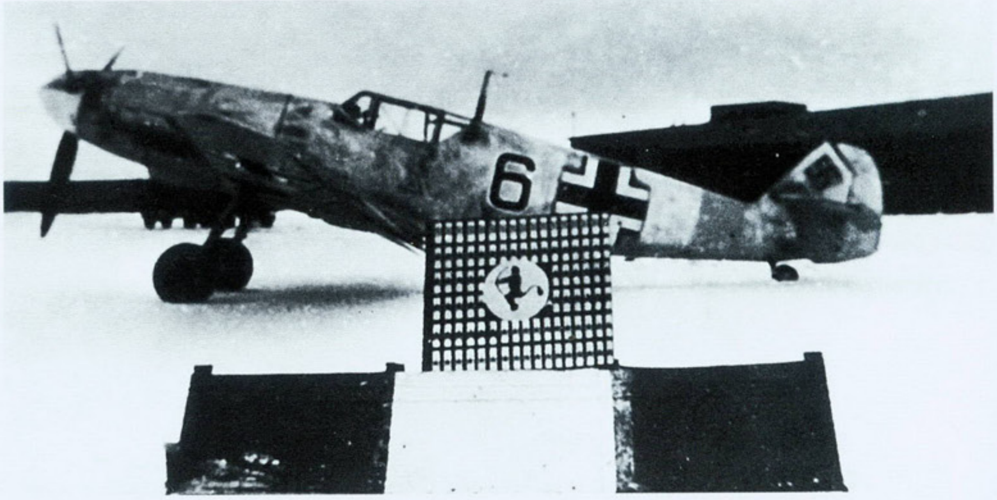


7./JG 54 badge

BELOW: The only information provided with this interesting photograph of a damaged Bf 109 F of 7./JG 54 was that it was taken on 12 February 1942. However, Luftwaffe loss records show that on that day, two aircraft from 7. Staffel were damaged in emergency or crash-landings, one, W.Nr. 8190, being flown by Ogfr. Herbert Biermann which was 40 per cent destroyed, and the other, W.Nr. 12633, being 20 per cent damaged when Uffz. Josef Brechtle made a wheels-up landing. Unfortunately, it is not known which of these two aircraft is shown here.

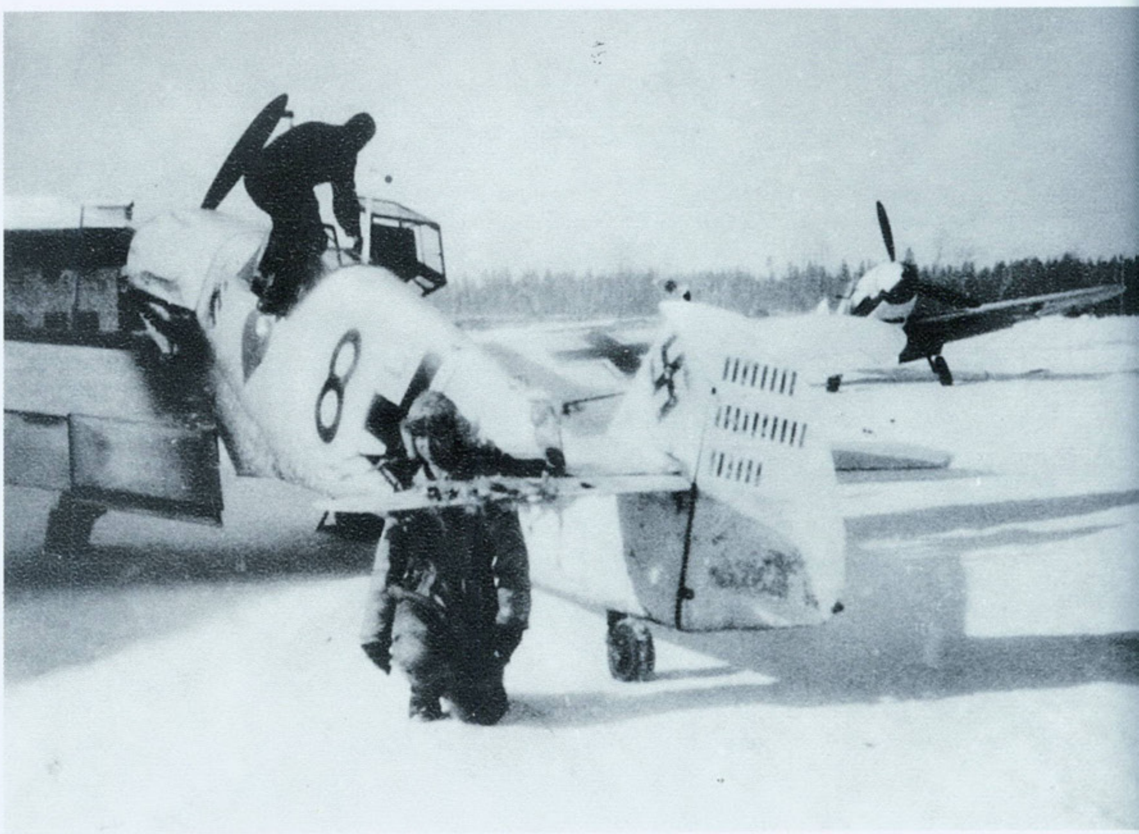


January-October 1942

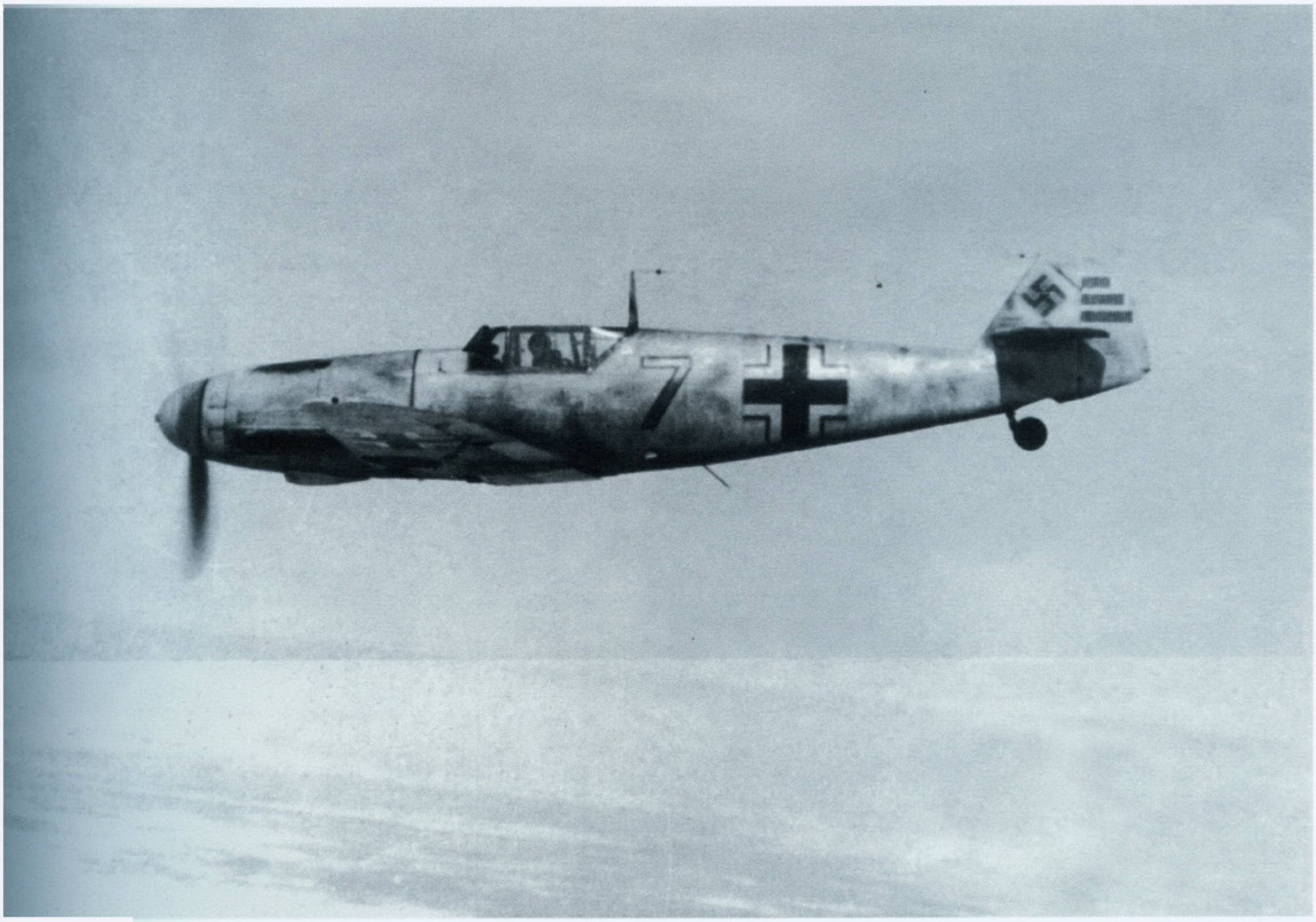


RIGHT: A Bf 109 F of 5./JG 52 parked behind the Staffel's scoreboard showing the unit's emblem and victories. The date of the photograph is not known but it was evidently taken during the Winter of 1941-42.

LEFT: Pilots and ground staff of 9./JG 52 giving Lt. Hermann Graf a triumphant welcome in the Winter of 1941/42. Despite the snow, Graf's aircraft has not yet received a winter camouflage.



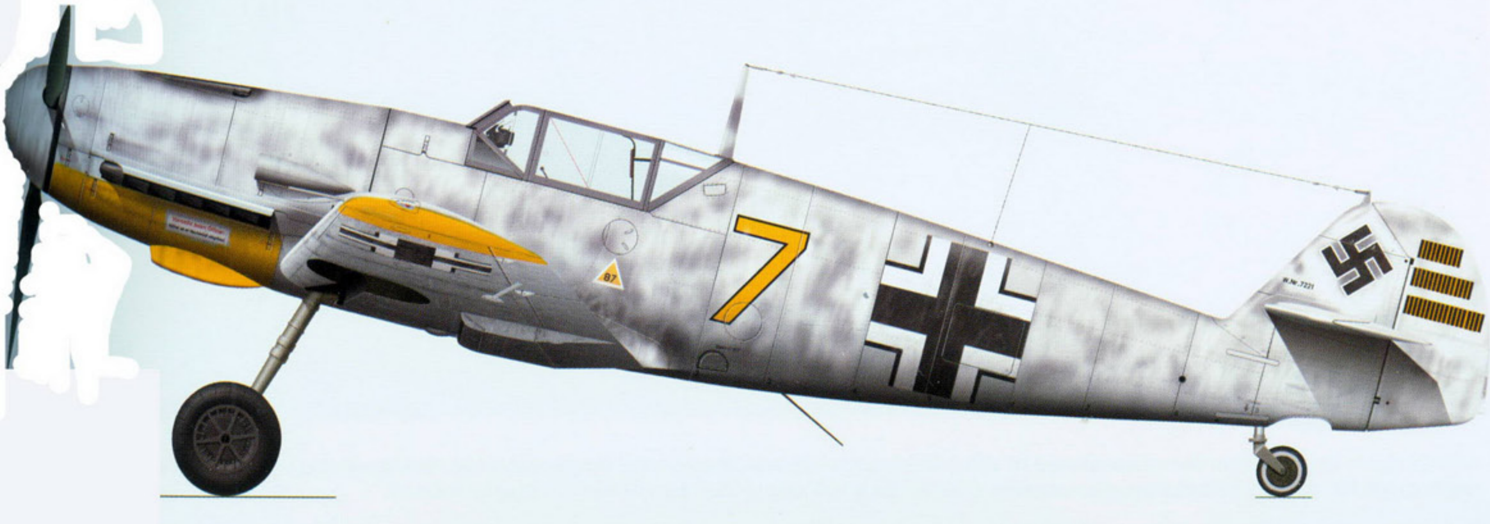
RIGHT: This Bf 109 F-2, coded 'Black 8', has often been identified as being an aircraft of 4./JG 54 flown by Ofw. Fritz Tegtmeier. However, the badge of I./JG 54 is clearly visible on the fuselage side and, on account of the 24 victory bars, the machine is now believed to have been flown by Lt. Herbert Broennle of 2./JG 54 who is known to have been flying a 'Black 8', W.Nr. 9234, when his aircraft was 20 per cent damaged in an air battle on 17 February 1942. This photograph possibly shows the same machine although the aircraft here appears to have been damaged by flak rather than in an air battle.



ABOVE: Photographed while patrolling the Demyansk area in February 1942, 'Yellow 7' was flown by Oblt. Heinrich Krafft, the Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 51 who, as one of the Geschwader's most successful pilots, was awarded the Knight's Cross on 18 March 1942.

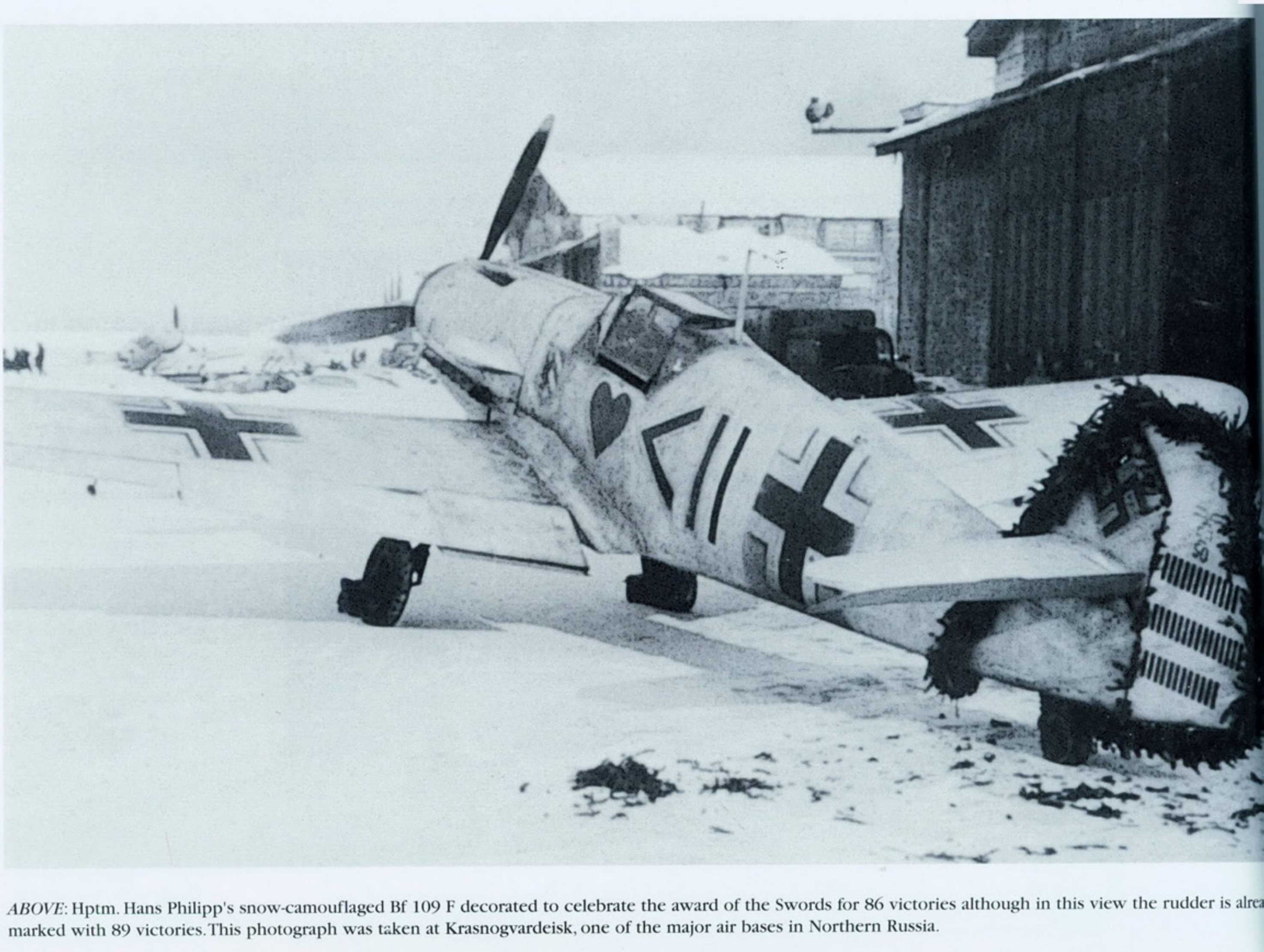
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Yellow 7' flown by Oblt. Heinrich Krafft, the Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 51, Soltsy, February 1942

The appearance of this machine is fairly typical of the many which received a temporary white finish during the Winter months in Russia although, in this instance, the white was applied in varying densities resulting in a patchy, almost mottled, finish. Dark areas, particularly the canopy framing, around the W.Nr. 7221 and the Hakenkreuz on the tail, and the rectangular areas left around the pilot's victory tally, show where the original 02/74/75/76 finish and yellow rudder were still visible. This machine carried no unit badges.

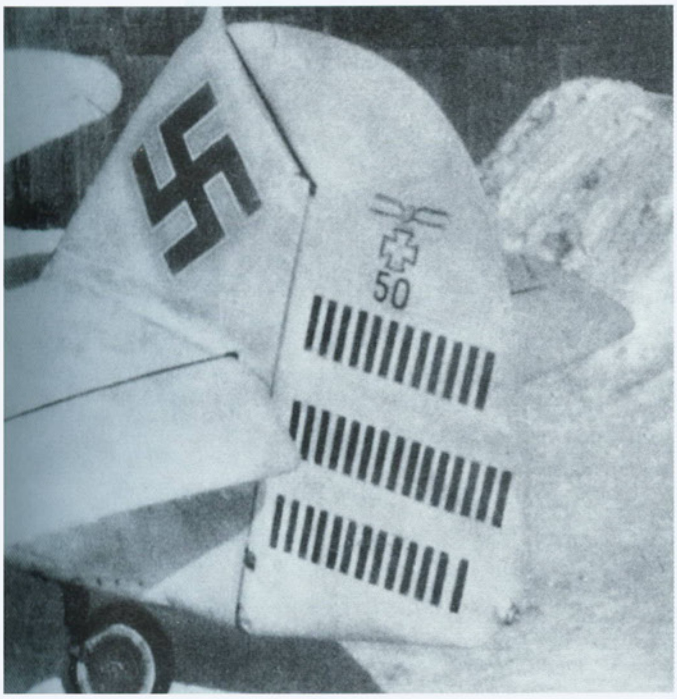


January-October 1942

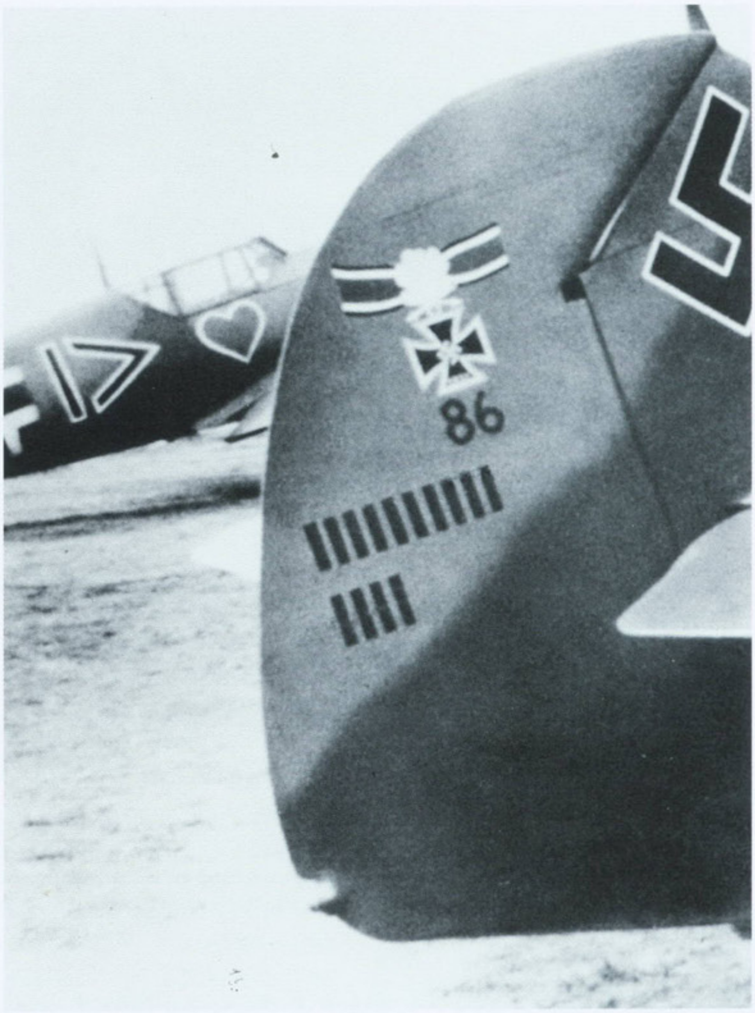
LEFT AND RIGHT: Hans Philipp first saw action during the Polish campaign, in which he scored his first victory. In August 1940, he was appointed Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 54 and soon gained a reputation for being an exceptional fighter pilot with a passion for fighter versus fighter combat. He was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 22 October 1940 with 20 victories and later flew in Yugoslavia, but his victory tally really began to increase in Russia and by 24 August 1941 he had received the Oak Leaves for 62 victories. In February 1942, aged only 25, Philipp became Kommandeur of I./JG 54 and was responsible for many young pilots who would themselves later become successful fighter pilots. On 12 March 1942, Philipp was awarded the Swords for his 86 victories and on 31 March became the fourth fighter pilot to reach 100 victories.

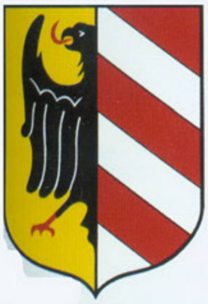


ABOVE: Hptm. Hans Philipp's snow-camouflaged Bf 109 F decorated to celebrate the award of the Swords for 86 victories although in this view the rudder is alrea marked with 89 victories. This photograph was taken at Krasnogvardeisk, one of the major air bases in Northern Russia.



LEFT: Close up of the victory markings on the rudder of Hptm. Hans Philipp's Bf 109 F-2, now marked with 90 victories.



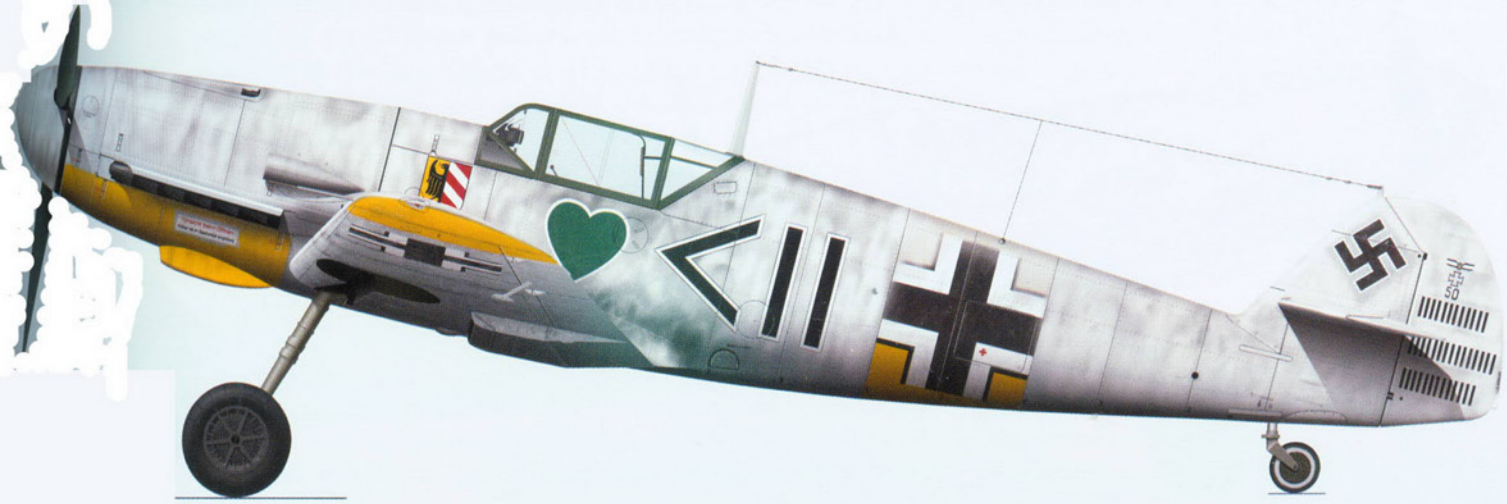


Badge of I./JG 54

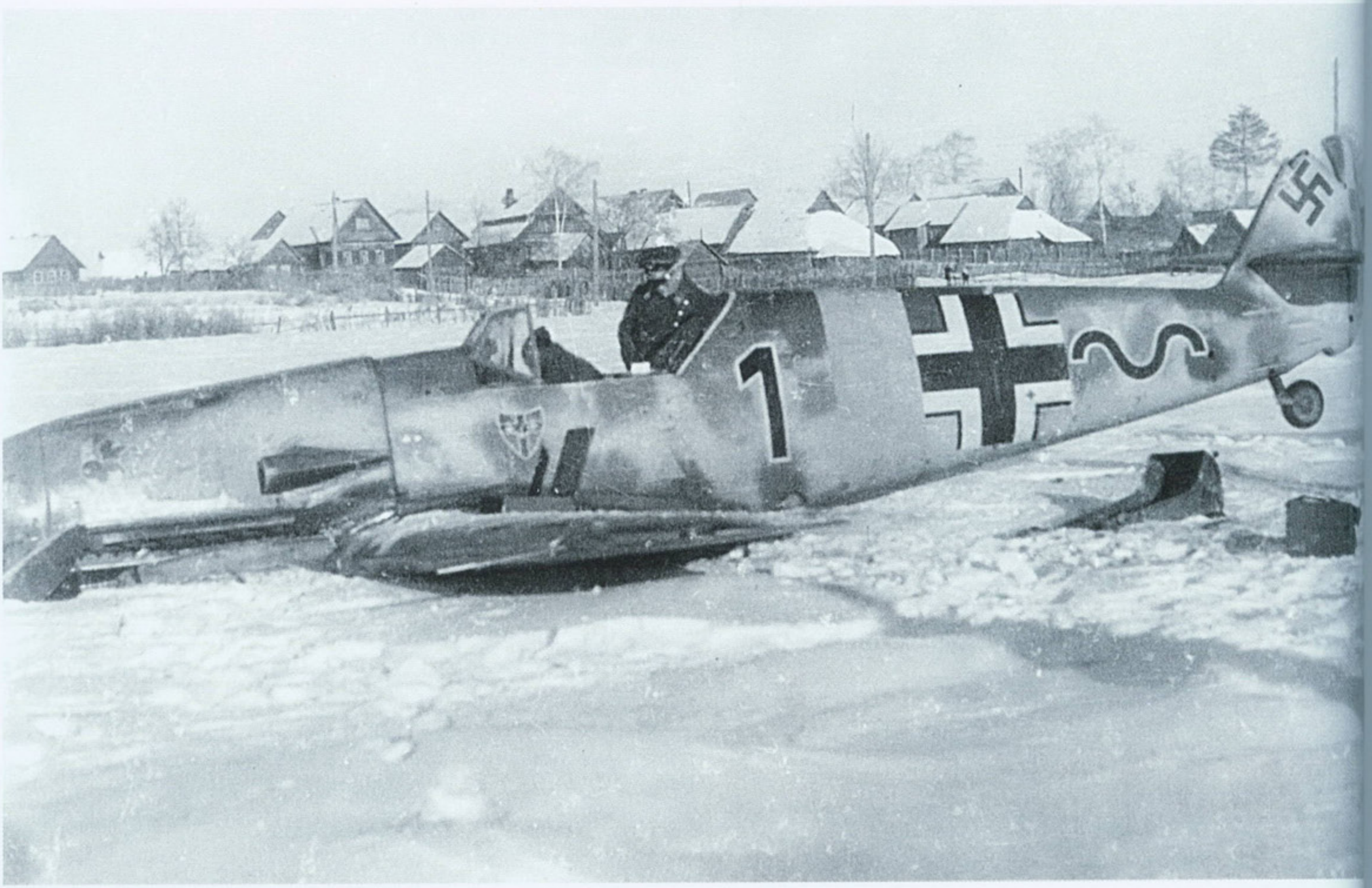
RIGHT: A later view of one of Hptm. Philipp's aircraft showing the rudder marked with 100 victories and a special decoration applied to celebrate the award of the Swords when his tally was 86. The similarly camouflaged machine in the background carries the chevron and vertical bar of the Geschwader Adjutant.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 flown by Hptm. Hans Philipp, Gruppenkommandeur of I./JG 54, Krasnogvardeisk, late March 1942

Despite the overall temporary white finish which obscures this aircraft's original two-tone green camouflage, this is still a fairly colourful machine on account of the yellow theatre markings, the I. Gruppe badge based upon the arms of the city of Nuremberg and the Geschwader 'Green Heart' emblem on the fuselage side. Further interest is provided by the fuselage Stab markings and the attractive rudder design.



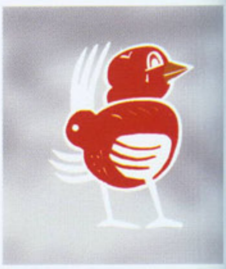
January-October 1942



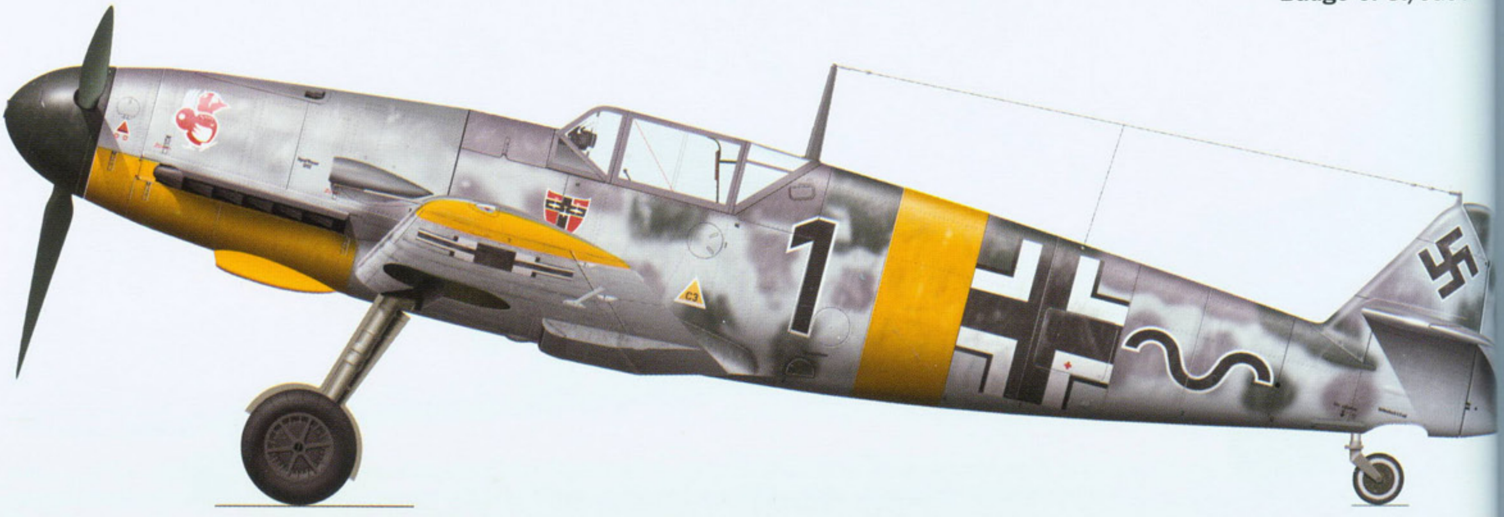
ABOVE: On 30 March 1942, this Bf 109 F-4 'Black 1' of 8./JG 54 was flying back to its airfield at Krasnogvardeisk when it encountered bad weather. The pilot, Oblt. Erwin Leykauf, was unable to find his airfield and when his aircraft, Werk Nummer 7492, eventually ran out of fuel, Leykauf made a wheels-up landing in open ground. In this photograph, ground staff have begun to dismantle the machine prior to returning it to the workshops for repair. The aircraft was found to be only 10% destroyed and later returned to service with 8./JG 54 as 'Black 2' but disappeared with its pilot, Gefr. Gerhard Dietz, on 12 May 1942.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Black 1' flown by Oblt. Erwin Leykauf, Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 54, Krasnogvardeisk, March 1942

Despite operating in conditions of snow and ice, this machine was not overpainted with a white scheme and remained in the standard RLM 74/75/76 factory finish with large, regular mottles on the fuselage sides. The badges of 8. Staffel and III. Gruppe appeared on the nose and fuselage sides, and a III. Gruppe wavy bar symbol was applied to the rear fuselage. Note that the yellow RLM 04 fuselage band has been positioned forward of the Balkenkreuz and that the engine cowling appears to be a replacement as its finish does not exactly match the fuselage.



Badge of 8./JG54



achieved no more than ten victories. On their base at Kharkov-Rogan, the men of this unit were amazed to hear totally contrary reports about the air war further south in the Mius sector. Operating there was I./JG 77, commanded by *Hptm.* Herbert Ihlefeld, a veteran of the *Legion Condor* in Spain, and already holder of the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves. During these Spring weeks, Ihlefeld's name was mentioned repeatedly in the *Wehrmachtsbericht*, the daily *Wehrmacht* radio bulletins:

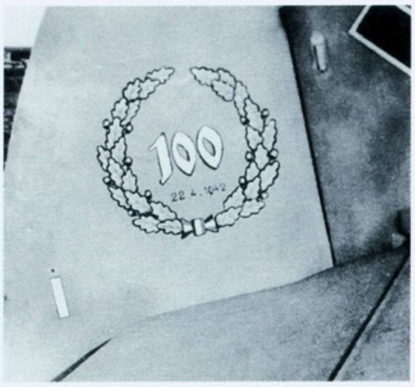
> ***"Hauptmann Ihlefeld achieved his eighty-second victory by shooting down seven enemy aircraft in one day."***
>
> *Wehrmachtsbericht, 31 March 1942*

> ***"Yesterday, Hauptmann Ihlefeld achieved his eighty-ninth to ninety-fifth victories on the Eastern Front."***
>
> *Wehrmachtsbericht, 21 April 1942*

> ***"Yesterday, Hauptmann Ihlefeld achieved his ninety-eighth to one hundred and first victories on the Eastern Front."***
>
> *Wehrmachtsbericht, 23 April 1942*

Of the 62 victories claimed by I./JG 77 in April 1942, remarkably without any losses, no fewer than 43 were claimed by *Hptm.* Ihlefeld and his wingman, *Oblt.* Friedrich Geisshardt. On 22 April, Ihlefeld crowned these remarkable successes by surpassing his 100-victory mark while Geisshardt attained his personal 60th. Two days later Ihlefeld was awarded the Swords and at the same time was promoted to the rank of *Major.* Shortly afterwards he was selected to be trained as a *Geschwaderkommodore*.

BELOW: As the scores of the Luftwaffe's most successful pilots continued to increase, space on the rudder for recording more than 100 individual victory bars became a problem. A popular solution was to repaint the rudder commencing with a design representing either 100 victories or the total number reached when the pilot was awarded the Ritterkreuz or other high decoration. A favourite design incorporated the number of victories in a wreath, as shown here on the rudder of Hptm. Herbert Ihlefeld's Bf 109 F-4, W.Nr. 7555. In this instance, a wreath of oak leaves encloses the number '100', representing this pilot's 100th victory on 22 April 1942, and a new running total of 101 victories is shown by the addition of a further bar. This 101st victory was claimed on 23 April, and on the 24th Ihlefeld was awarded the Swords.



A study of I./JG 77 provides a picture of a typical *Jagdgruppe*, where over 90 per cent of the victories accumulated in March 1942 were attained by the unit's officers. III./JG 52 appears to have had a slightly different character, since some of its best aces were NCOs, the most famous being *Fw.* Leopold Steinbatz, *Fw.* Gerhard Köppen, and *Fw.* Alfred Grislawski. Steinbatz achieved his 40th to 42nd victories on 8 January, for which he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz*. Köppen had attained these feats already in December 1941, and following his 69th to 72nd victories on 24 February, he was awarded the Oak Leaves. Grislawski flew as wingman to *Lt.* Hermann Graf, 9./JG 52's *Staffelkapitän,* and had amassed a total of 17 victories in March 1942.

In late April, III./JG 52 was transferred southwards to the Crimea as part of the build-up of *Luftwaffe* forces supporting a counter-attack against the Soviet Crimean Front. *Generaloberst* von Richthofen established the staff of his VIII. *Fliegerkorps* in the Crimea, and III./JG 52 was one of several fighter units brought under his command. The other *Jagdgruppen* were I./JG 3, II./JG 52, 15. (*Kroat*)/JG 52, and I. and II./JG 77 which were mostly stationed at Zürichtal.

The arrival of III./JG 52 immediately plunged VVS Crimean Front into severe difficulties. On 30 April, Graf shot down six of its aircraft while Grislawski bagged two, followed by another four on 1 May. Next day, seven Soviet aircraft fell to Graf's Bf 109 F-4, his 70th to 76th victories, while Gerhard Köppen (in the meantime promoted to *Leutnant*) attained his 80th to 84th. Competition between Köppen and Graf was brought to a fatal conclusion on 5 May, when Köppen was shot down while carrying out a reckless attack against a Pe-2. The German pilot ditched in the Sea of Azov and was never seen again.

The German attack against the Crimean Front opened on 8 May. Superior in both numbers and technical equipment, VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was able to eliminate VVS Crimean Front in only a few days and, after two weeks in the Crimea, III./JG 52 was moved back to Kharkov-Rogan on the 12th. *Lt.* Graf's 9./JG 52 had attained 90 victories without a single loss, Graf himself scoring his 90th personal victory during the transfer flight from Zürichtal to Kharkov-Rogan.

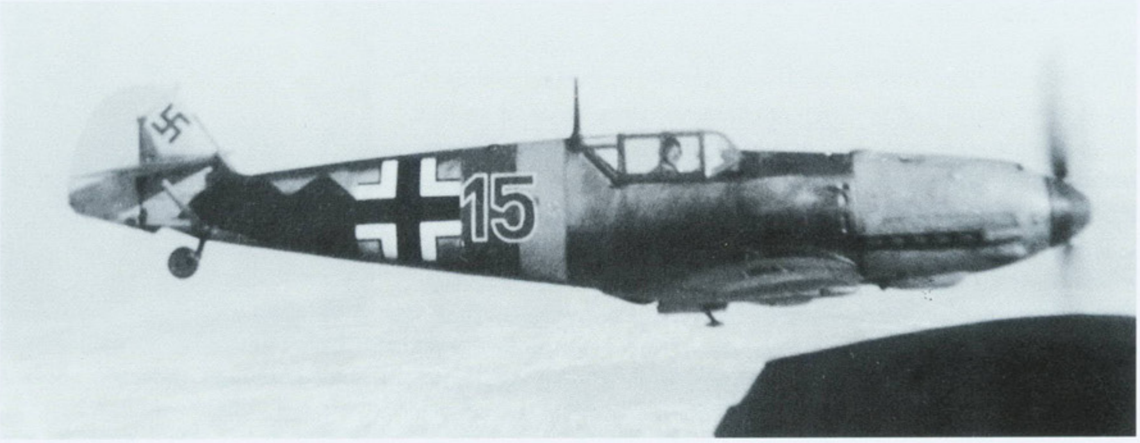
While the final battle was fought over the city of Kerch in eastern Crimea, German fighters dealt harshly with Soviet air units that flew in from the north-western Caucasus. Two new names appeared here: *Hptm.* Gordon Gollob and *Hptm.* Heinz Bär. Gollob, who had earned fame with JG 3 in 1941, arrived to assume command of JG 77 on 16 May 1942. Five days earlier, Bär, who had been one of the greatest aces in JG 51, had been appointed *Major* Ihlefeld's successor as I./JG 77's

Gruppenkommandeur. While Gollob refrained from reporting four of his victories, thus avoiding the usual grounding order bestowed on any pilot reaching 100 victories, Bär shot down his 99th to 103rd victims on 19 May. That day too, JG 77 celebrated its 2,000th aerial victory.

Meanwhile, at Kharkov-Rogan, the pilots of III./JG 52 found they had returned to a hornet's nest. On 12 May, Soviet South-Western Front had launched a major offensive against German Army Group South's positions to the south and north of Kharkov. This drive was strongly supported from the air and on the first day III./JG 52 made its mark on the attacking VVS formations. Of 65 Soviet aircraft claimed shot down over the Kharkov battlefields on 13 May, the greatest number - 42 - was achieved by III./JG 52, including six by *Lt.* Hermann Graf (victories 91 – 96) and the *Jagdgruppe's* 1,000th in total. The next day Graf claimed another eight victories, bringing his tally to 104, while his wingman, Grislawski, claimed two and *Lt.* Adolf Dickfeld claimed nine bringing his total to 90.

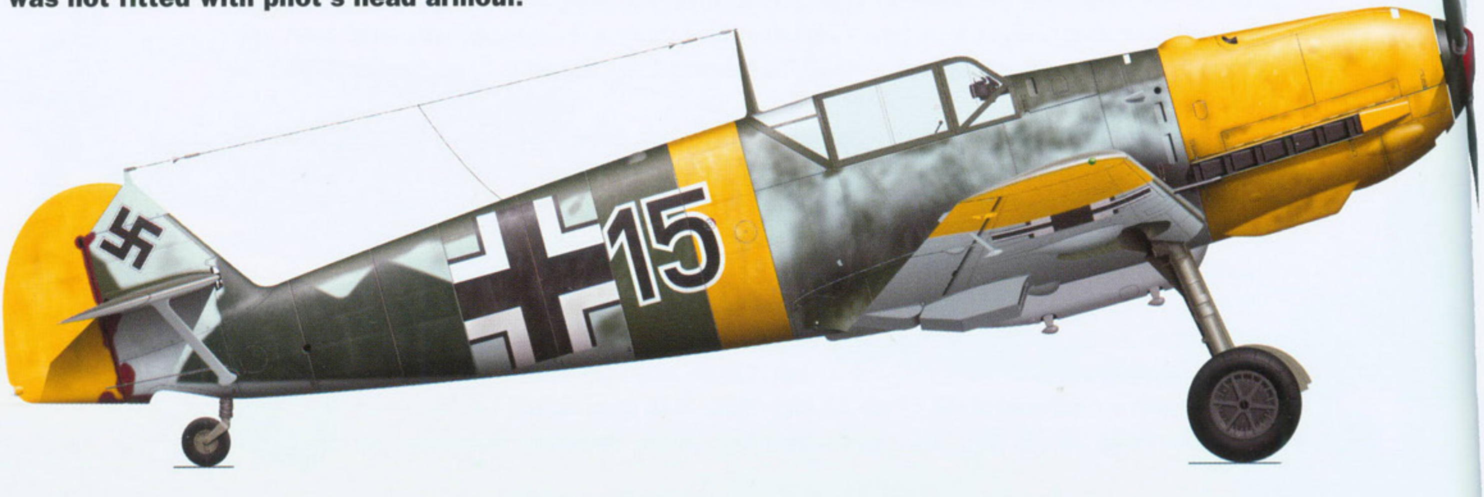
These aces continued to reap a deadly harvest among the inadequately trained Soviet airmen while, on the ground, troops of South-Western Front succumbed to a German pincer movement. On 18 May Dickfeld surpassed all previous records by claiming 11 kills in a single day, reaching a total of 100 in the process. He was awarded the Oak Leaves the following day. Meanwhile, Hermann Graf had been awarded the Oak Leaves on 17 May and, just two days later, the Swords. His wingman, *Fw.* Grislawski achieved 22 confirmed victories plus one unconfirmed during May alone, and his friend, *Ofw.* Leopold Steinbatz, shot down 34 during the same period.

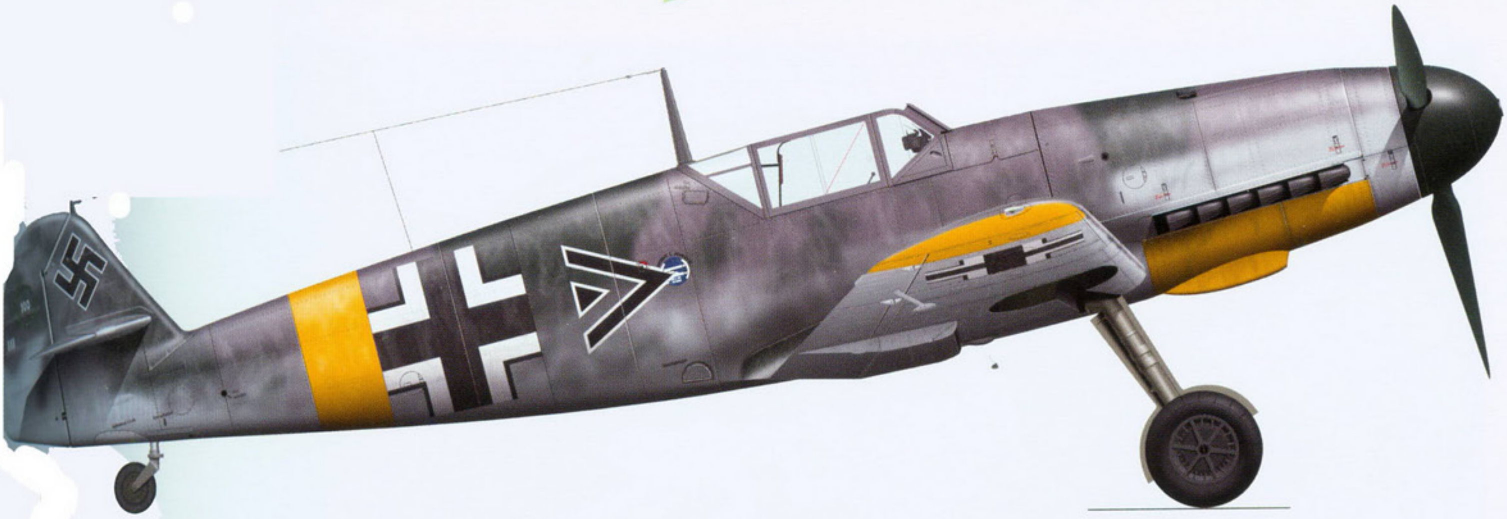
By the time the Battle of Kharkov reached its bloody conclusion, Hermann Graf's 9./JG 52 had become famous among even the most humble German ground troops in the Kharkov area as the *'Karayastaffel'*. The *'Karayastaffel'* was characterised by its relaxed relationship between the *Staffelkapitän,* Graf, and his subordinates, and its extraordinarily high combat spirit. On these grounds, it would develop into the war's most successful *Jagdstaffel,* eventually including in its ranks the 352-victory ace Erich Hartmann.



LEFT: Although the Bf 109 F-4 saw action on the Eastern Front with JG 77, the Ergänzungsgruppe of JG 77 was still operating the older Bf 109 E in the Spring of 1942, as shown in this photograph of a Bf 109 E-7, 'Black 15'. In February 1942, a detachment from Erg.Gr./JG 77 saw action on the Ukrainian Front where, for several weeks, it flew fighter-bomber missions against Soviet airfields and transport columns.

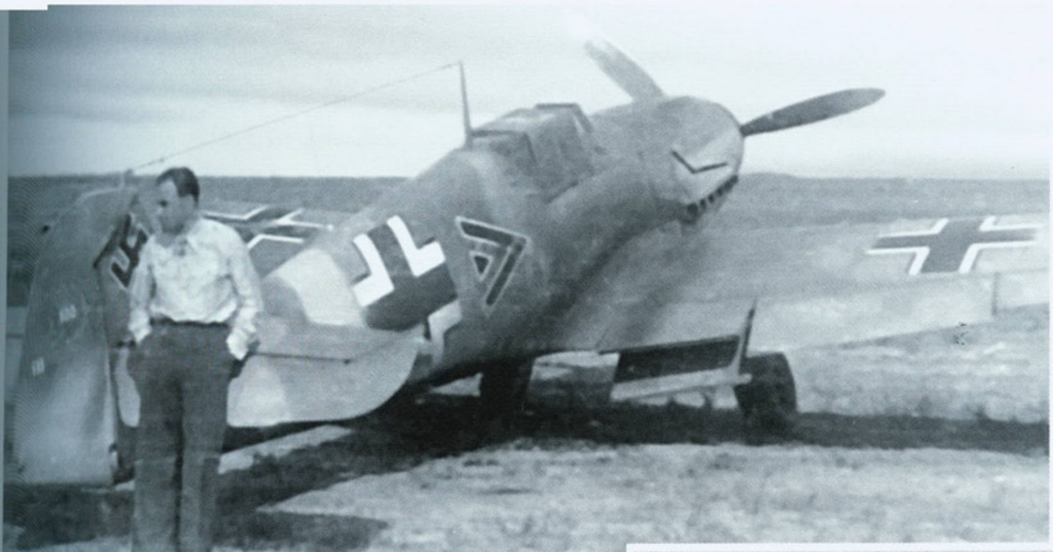
Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 'Black 15' of Erg.Gr./JG 77, Ukrainian Front, Spring 1942
Originally finished in a standard 02/71 scheme, this aircraft has had its rear fuselage resprayed with fresh 70 and 71, possibly to obscure a previous identity or to tone down the lighter areas of its original camouflage. Note the small, non-standard blister above the number on the fuselage and that this machine was not fitted with pilot's head armour.

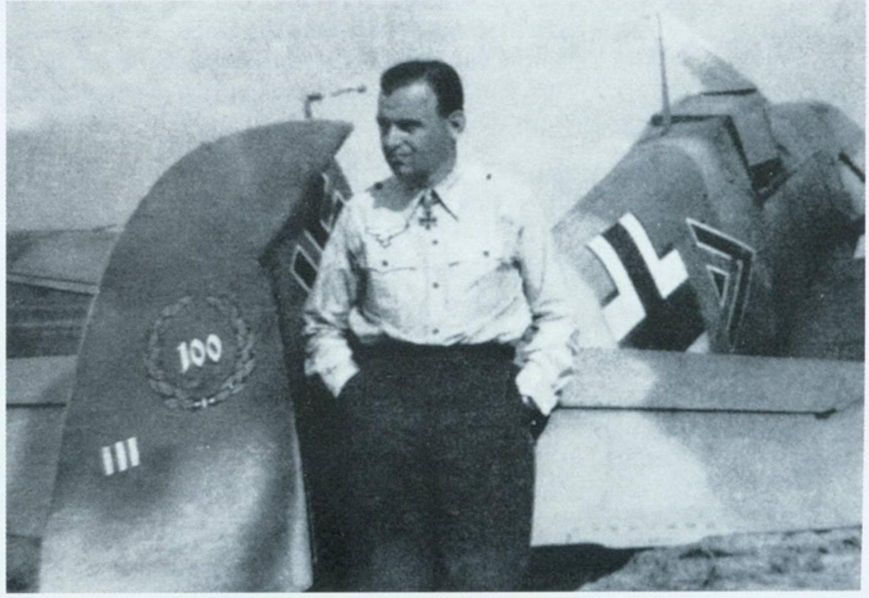




Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 flown by Major Heinz Bär, Kommandeur of I./JG 77, Crimea, May 1942

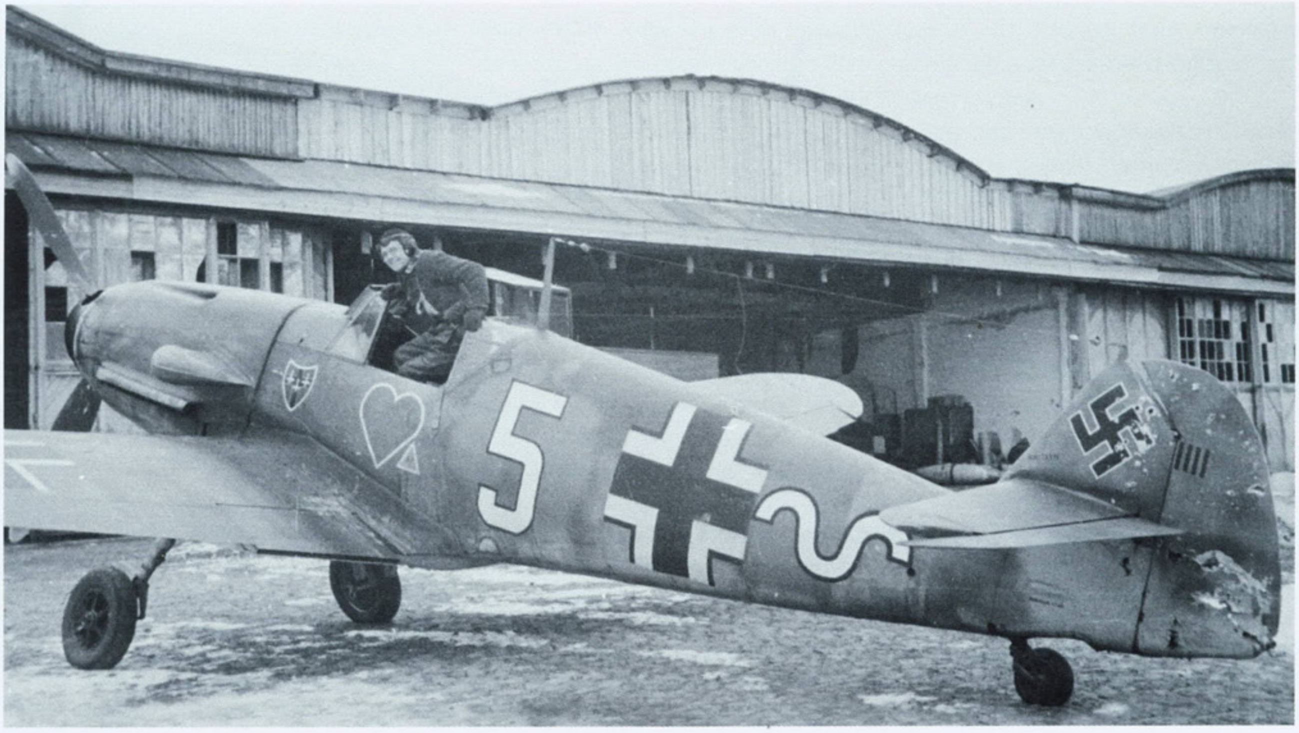
At first glance, the relatively ordinary appearance of this aircraft provides no indication that it was flown by one of the Luftwaffe's most successful day fighter pilots who would later become the Luftwaffe's top jet ace with 16 victories scored while flying the Me 262 and who would survive the war with 220 victories. The camouflage scheme is in the standard RLM colours 74/75/76, and even the spinner remains in RLM 70 and has no coloured tip or segment. No unit markings are displayed and although the fuselage side carries the black and white double chevron of a Gruppenkommandeur, it is only the modest rudder decoration which indicates the pilot of this aircraft has 103 victories. Note the similarity between this design and that applied to Hptm. Ihlefeld's aircraft, shown on page 315 and clearly the product of the same artist.





ABOVE AND RIGHT: The relocation of JG 51 to the Eastern Front in 1941 resulted in a rapid rise in victories claimed by a number of pilots, including Heinz Bär, and on 2 July 1941 he was promoted to Leutnant and awarded the Knight's Cross for 27 victories. When he reached 60 victories on 14 August, Bär was decorated with the Oak Leaves and, at the beginning of 1942, took command of IV./JG 51. In mid-February, having achieved 90 victories, he was awarded the Swords and in May succeeded Hptm. Herbert Ihlefeld as Kommandeur of I./JG 77. These two photographs show Major Bär with one of his Bf 109 F-4s, the rudder of which features a simple laurel wreath design enclosing the number '100' to commemorate Bär's 100th victory, to which have been added another three bars. Bär claimed his 103rd victory on 19 May 1942 while operating from Kerch (East) airfield in the Crimea. For this feat, Bär was mentioned in the OKW bulletin of 20 May which stated:-

Hauptmann Bär, Gruppenkommandeur in a Jagdgeschwader, achieved his 99th to 103rd aerial victories yesterday. The total victory tally of Jagdgeschwader 77 has increased to 2,011.'



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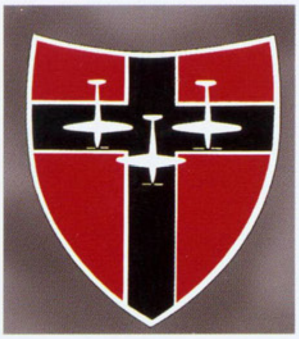
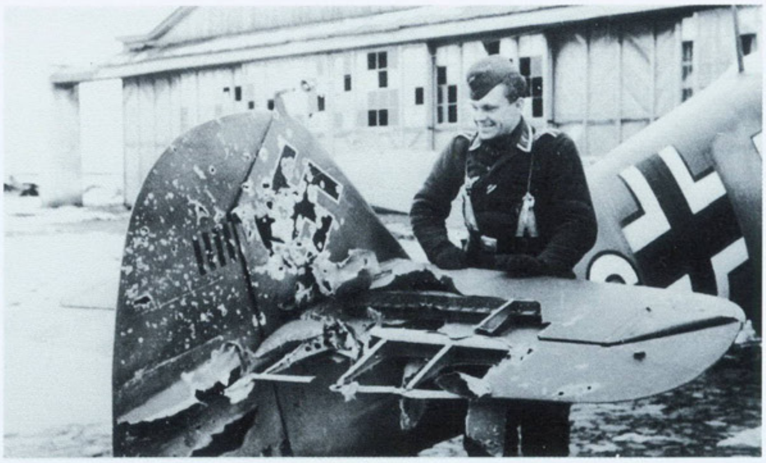
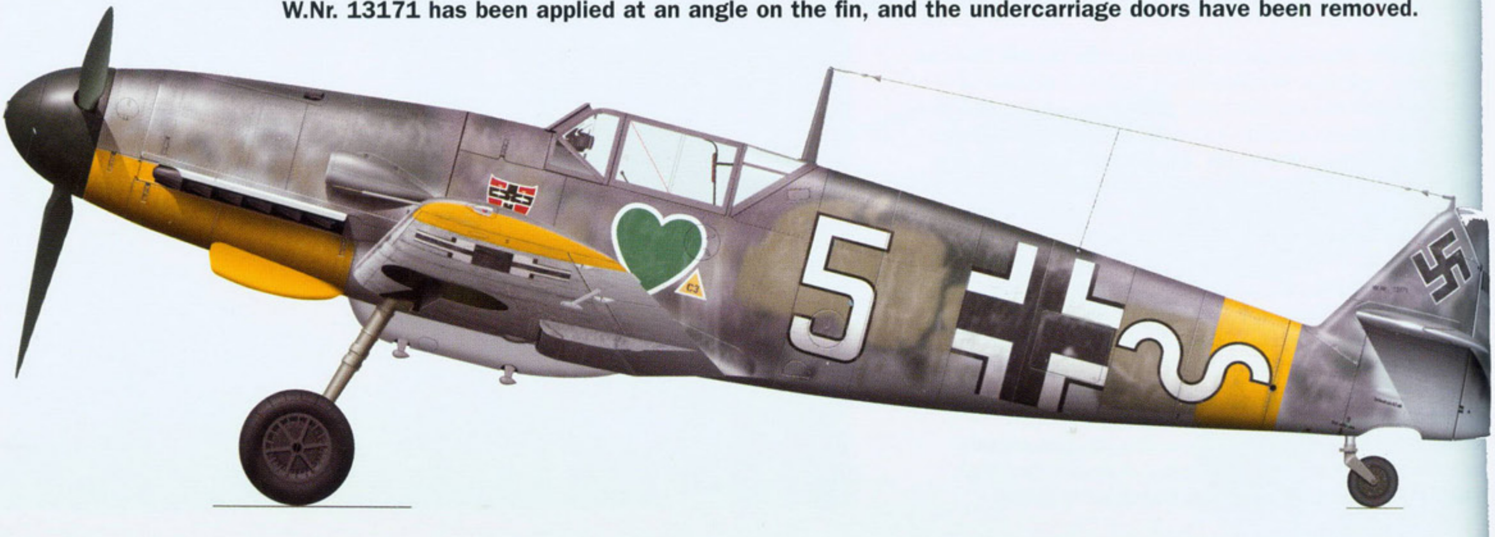


Badge of III./JG 54



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4/R1 'White 5', W.Nr. 13171 flown by Uffz. Gerhard Raimann of 7./J May 1942

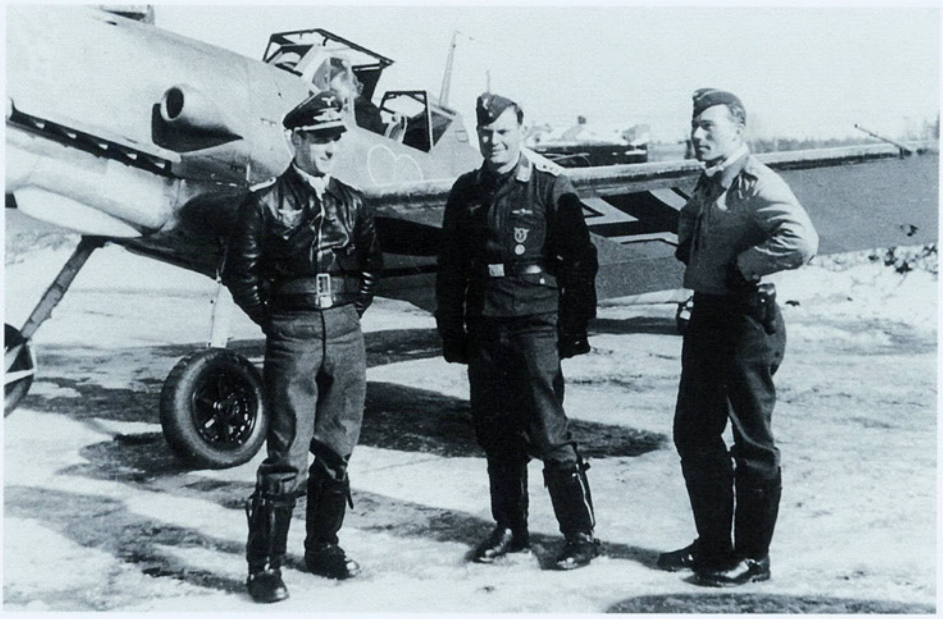
Unlike many other JG 54 aircraft, this machine does not appear to have received the modified two-tone green scheme favoured by the unit and is believed to have retained a 74/75/76 scheme, to which has been added a light 02 mottle. Note that the markings on this aircraft have been changed and that its earlier identity has bee painted out with additional patches of 02. Four black victory bars appear on each side of the rudder, the W.Nr. 13171 has been applied at an angle on the fin, and the undercarriage doors have been removed.

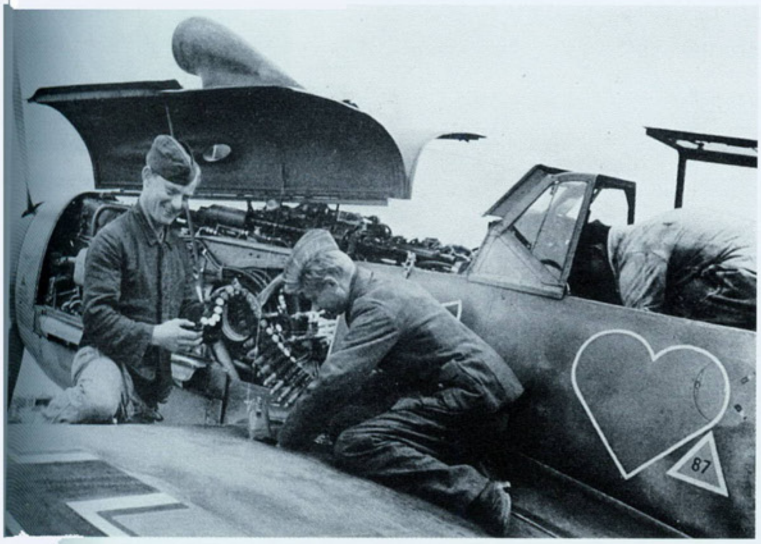


LEFT: One of the lesser-known Ritterkreuzträger of the Luftwaffe was Ofw. Otto Tange of 5./JG 51, who had 41 victories when he was awarded the Knight's Cross on 19 March 1942.

RIGHT: Ofw. Hans Schleef, shown here seated on the rear fuselage of W.Nr. 5631, flew with 7./JG 3 and was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 9 May 1942 after 41 victories.

RIGHT: On 4 April 1942, pilots from I. and III./JG 54 claimed eight victories on the Leningrad Front. Three of the successful pilots, all of whom claimed one each, are shown in this photograph, taken that day. From left to right are: Oblt. Günther Fink of Stab III./JG 54; Ofw. Rudolf Klemm of 8.Staffel; and Hptm. Heinrich Jung, also of Stab III. Gruppe. The reason for the photograph was that the second of the day's eight victories was the Geschwader's 2,000th, shot down by Ofw. Klemm, whose aircraft is seen in the background.

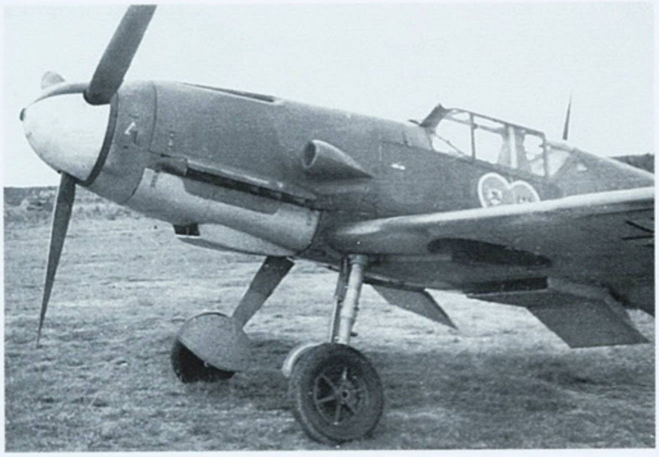


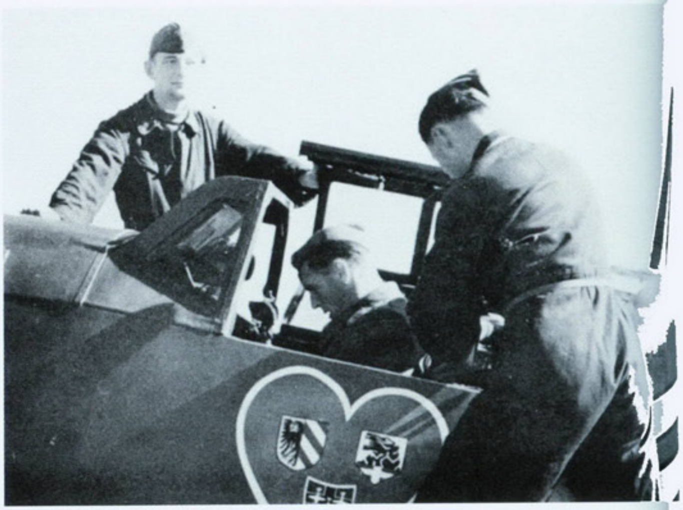


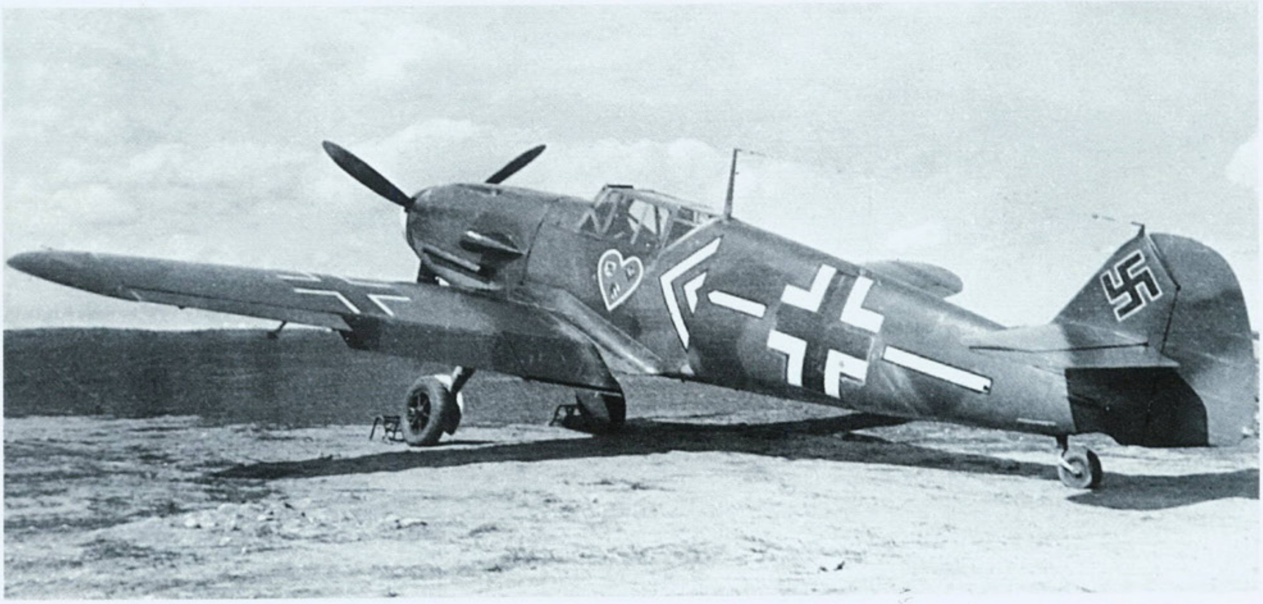
ABOVE: Luftwaffe armourers reloading the ammunition tank for the engine-mounted MG 151 cannon on a Bf 109 F-4 of III./JG 54.

BELOW: On 9 May 1942, General der Flieger Helmuth Förster (left), officer commanding I. Fliegerkorps, awarded the Ritterkreuz to Lt. Horst Hannig (centre) and Lt. Hans Beisswenger, both of II./JG 54. At this time, Hannig had 48 victories, and Beisswenger 47.

January-October 1942



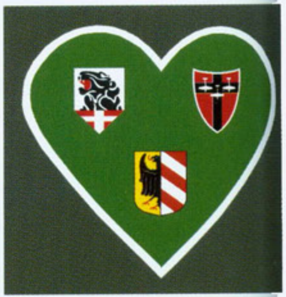




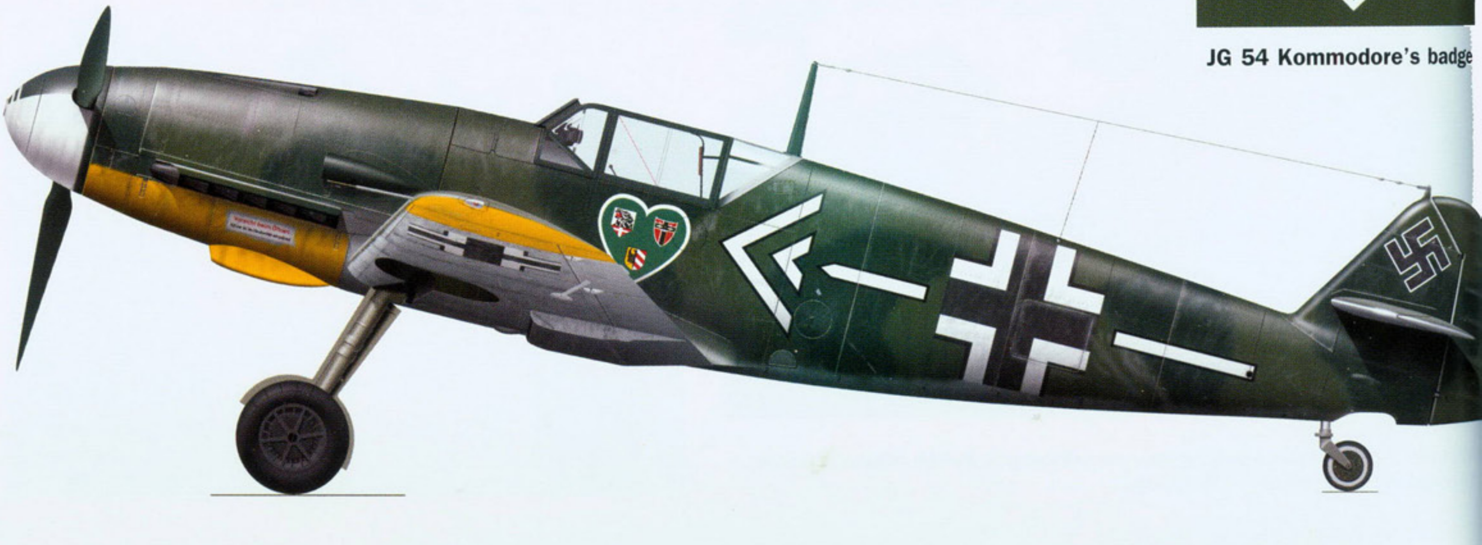
LEFT, ABOVE LEFT & ABOVE: Hannes Tra served as JG 54's Geschwaderkommo between August 194 July 1943, and under command this Jagdgeschwader developed into one of the most well-administered units in Luftwaffe. These photographs show th different Bf 109 F-4s by Major Trautloft in 1942, each one shows slight variations in the camouflage and markings. Note particularly that the sequence of Gruppen badges within the Gre Heart emblem is not consistent.

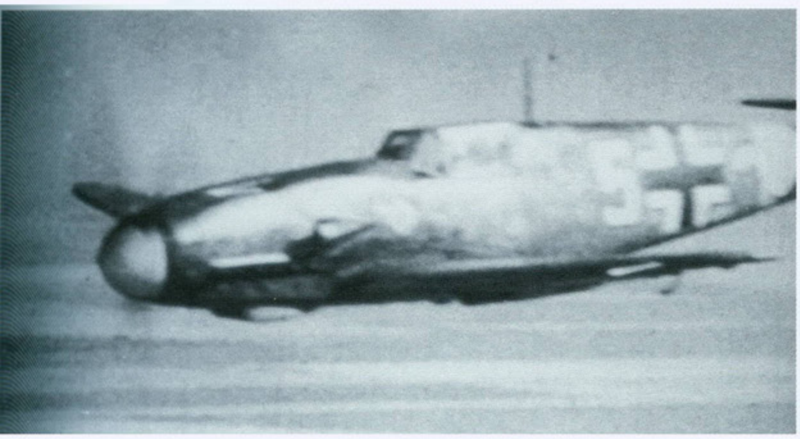
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 flown by Major Hannes Trautloft, Kommodore of JG 54, Siverskaya, May 1942

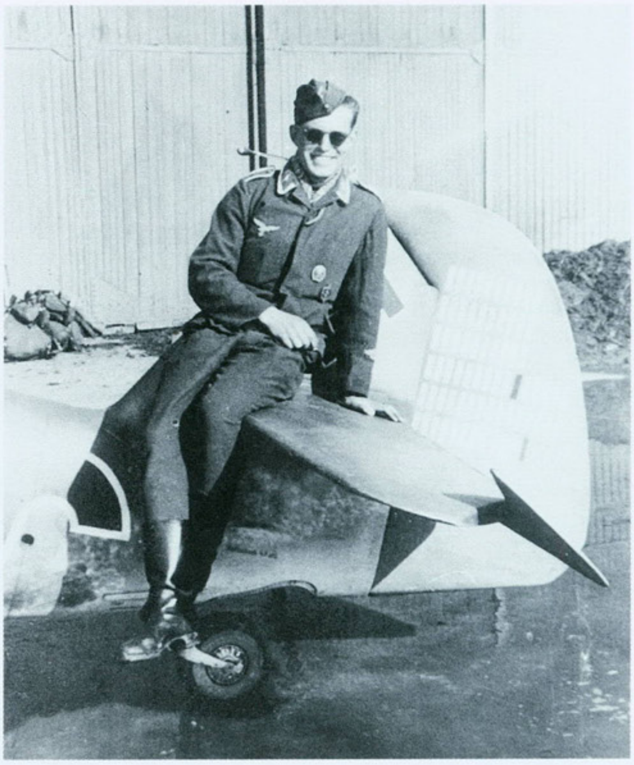
This machine was finished in the two green tones RLM 70 and 71 and carried the Stab markings of a Geschwaderkommodore on the fuselage sides. A variation of the Geschwader emblem unique to the aircraft flown by Trautloft was the inclusion of the three Gruppe badges superimposed on the 'Green Heart'. Note, however, that not all these 'Green Heart' badges were the same as the sequence of Gruppe emblems within the heart varied.

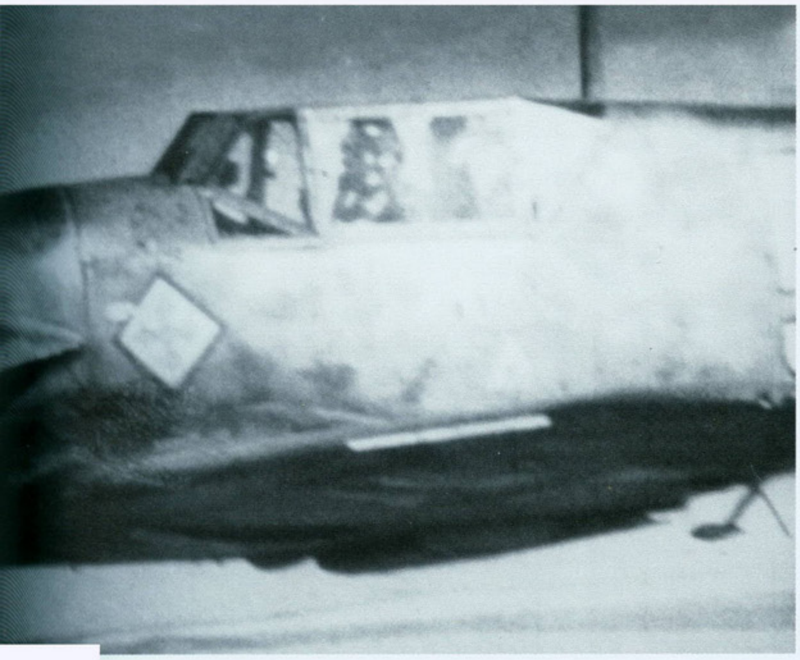


JG 54 Kommodore's badge







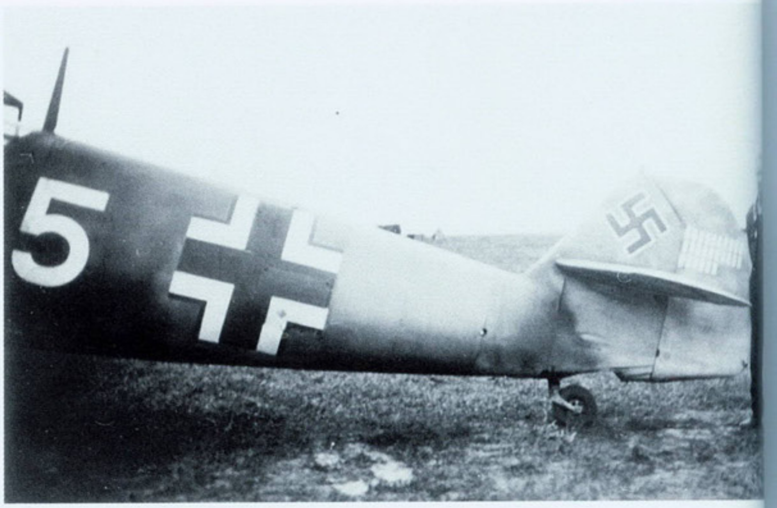


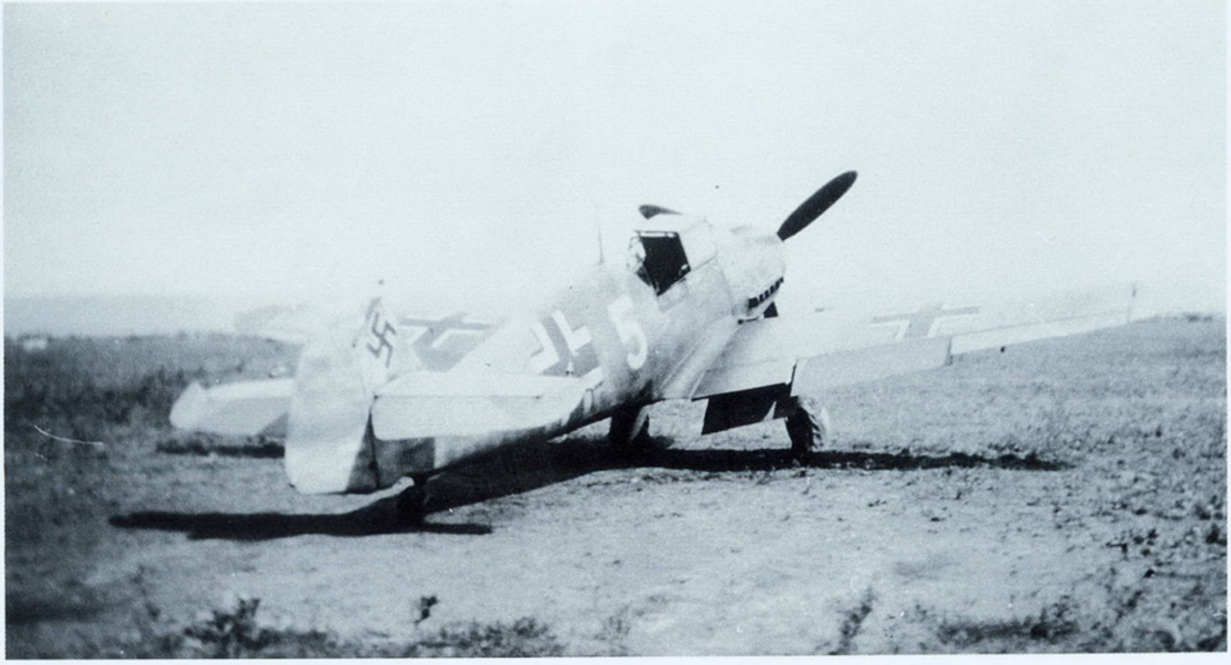
ABOVE: Fw. Gerhard Köppen of 7./JG 52, seen here with W.Nr. 7391, received the Oak Leaves on 27 February 1942 after 72 victories.

LEFT AND TOP LEFT: Stills from a cine-film showing Bf 109 F 'White 5' of 7./JG 52 closing up extremely tightly to the filming aircraft.

BELOW: Lt. Adolf Dickfeld of III./JG 52, photographed on 14 May 1942, when he shot down nine enemy aircraft. On 18 May, he destroyed 11 aircraft, bringing his score to 100 victories, and was awarded the Oak Leaves the following day.

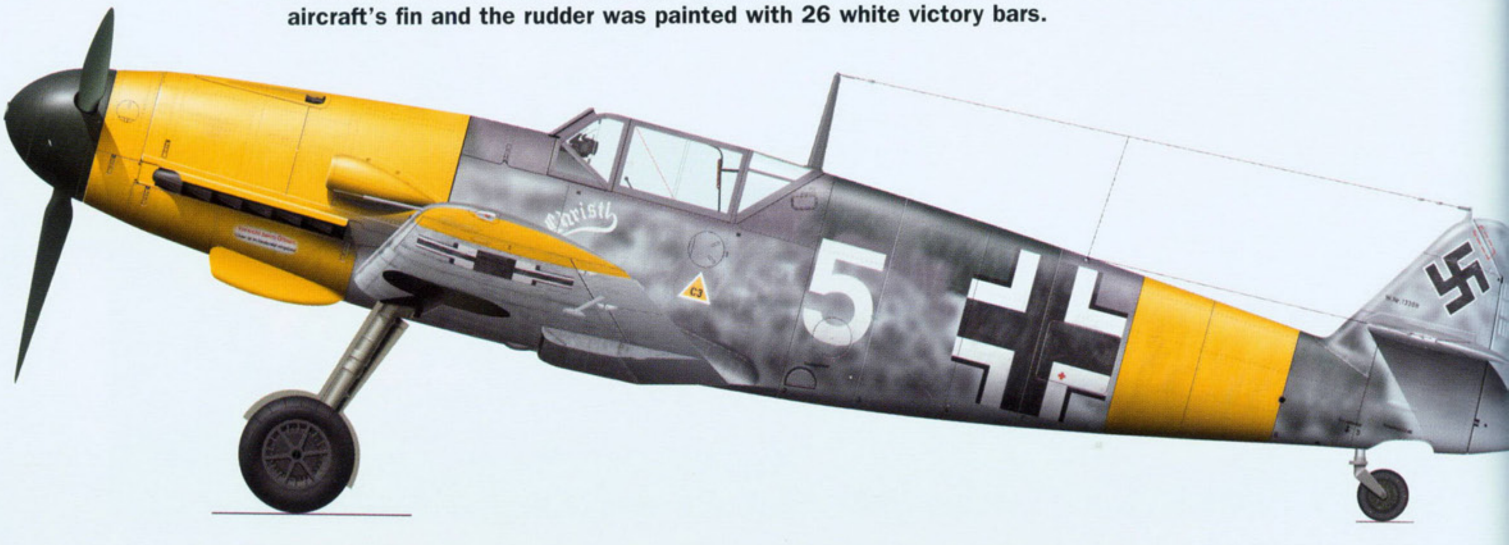
RIGHT AND BELOW: This Bf 109 F coded 'White 5' was flown in Russia by Gerhard Barkhorn, Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 52. Barkhorn joined the Luftwaffe in 1937 and, after training, was posted to 3./JG 2 and, in August 1940, to 6./JG 52 on the Channel Front. He flew his early missions during the Battle of Britain but his first success was achieved over the Eastern Front when, on his 120th mission on 2 July 1941, he shot down a DB-3. On 1 March 1942, Lt. Barkhorn was appointed Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 52 and, in these photographs, his aircraft is marked with 26 victories representing his tally after he destroyed five Lagg-3s on 22 June 1942. Barkhorn survived the war with a final tally of 301 victories.



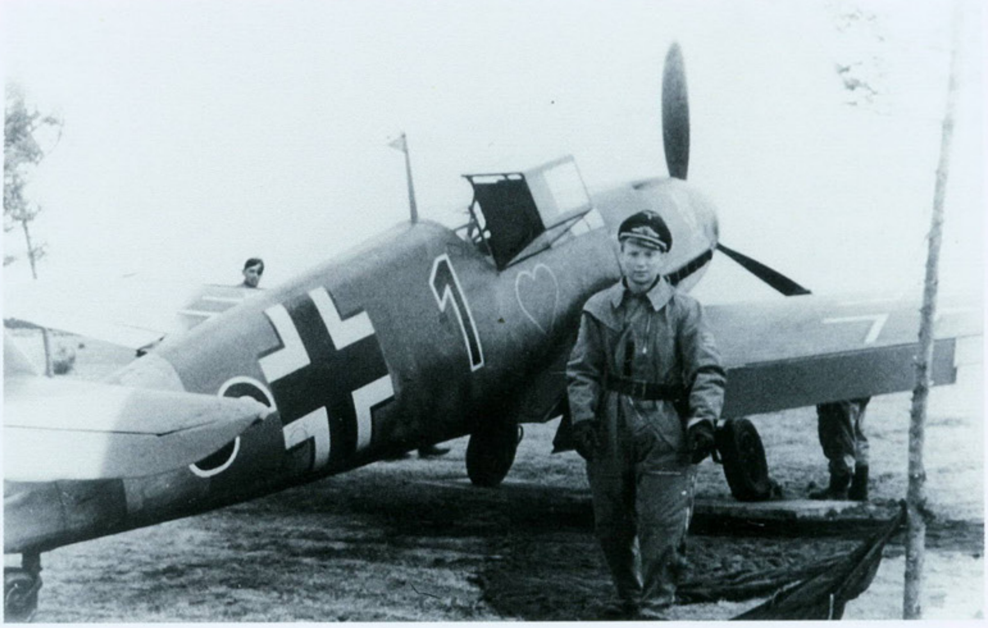


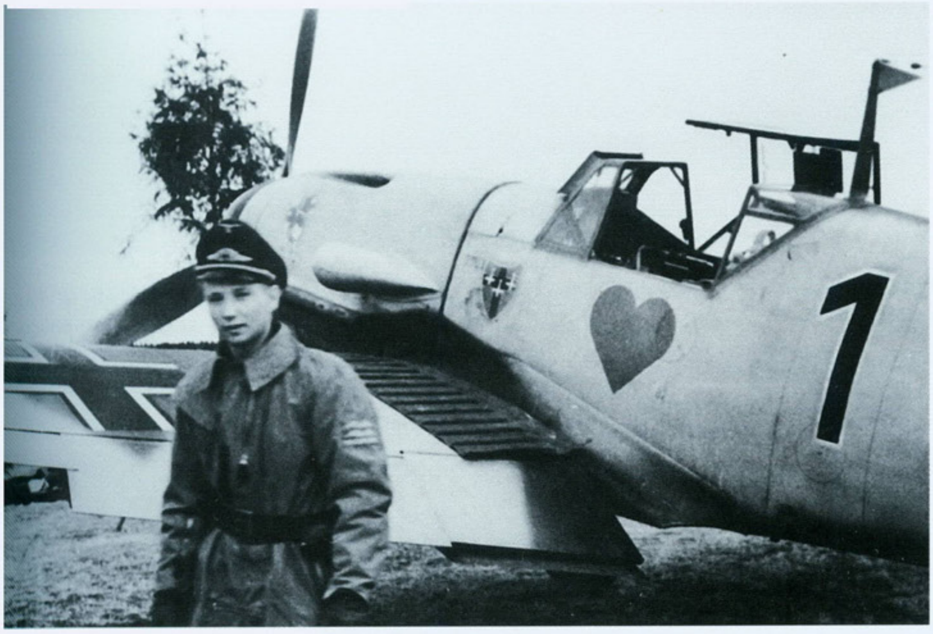
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4, 'White 5', flown by Lt. Gerhard Barkhorn, Staffelkapitän of 4./JG
June 1942

This aircraft was finished in standard 74/75/76 colours applied in a rather dense scheme and had an unusual wide yellow band on the rear fuselage. The aircraft carried no Geschwader, Gruppe or Staffel badges, but Barkhorn's wife's name, 'Christl', was painted in white below the windcreen on the port side of the fuselage. Barkhorn retained this name, and the number '5', on all his aircraft, the numeral later appearing in miniature superimposed upon his aircraft's Stab markings. On this machine, the Werk Nummer 13388 appeared on the aircraft's fin and the rudder was painted with 26 white victory bars.

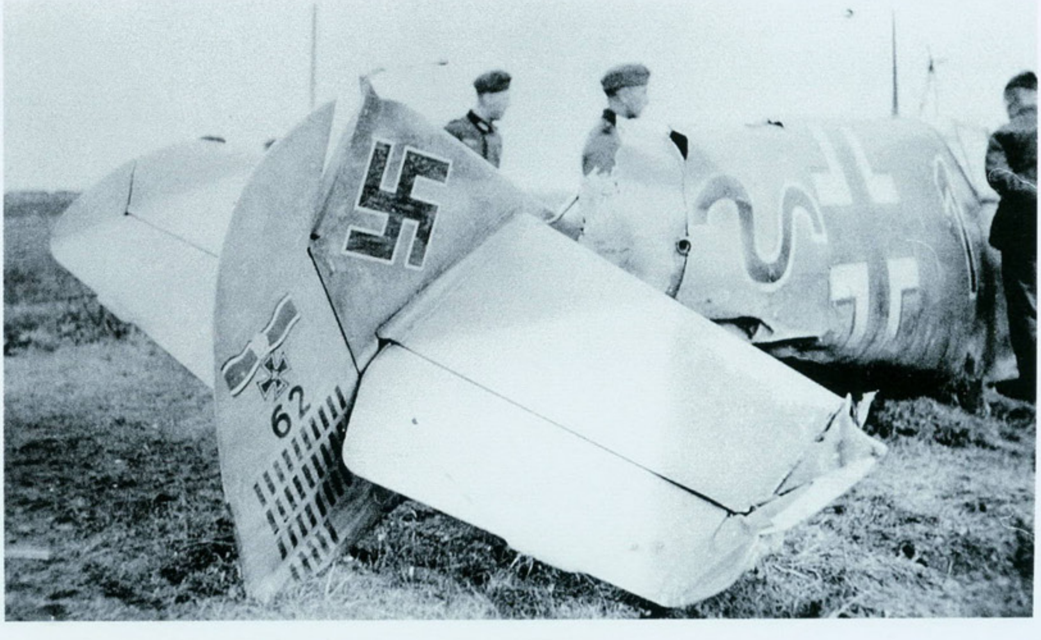


ABOVE: Oblt. Max-Hellmuth Ostermann with Eichenlaub mit Schwertern zum Ritterkreuz, awarded on 17 May 1942.

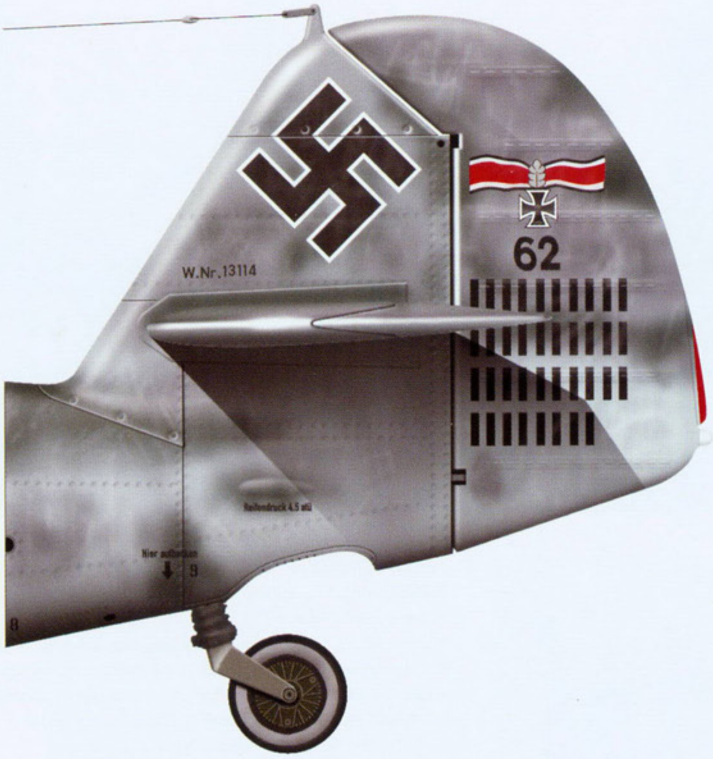




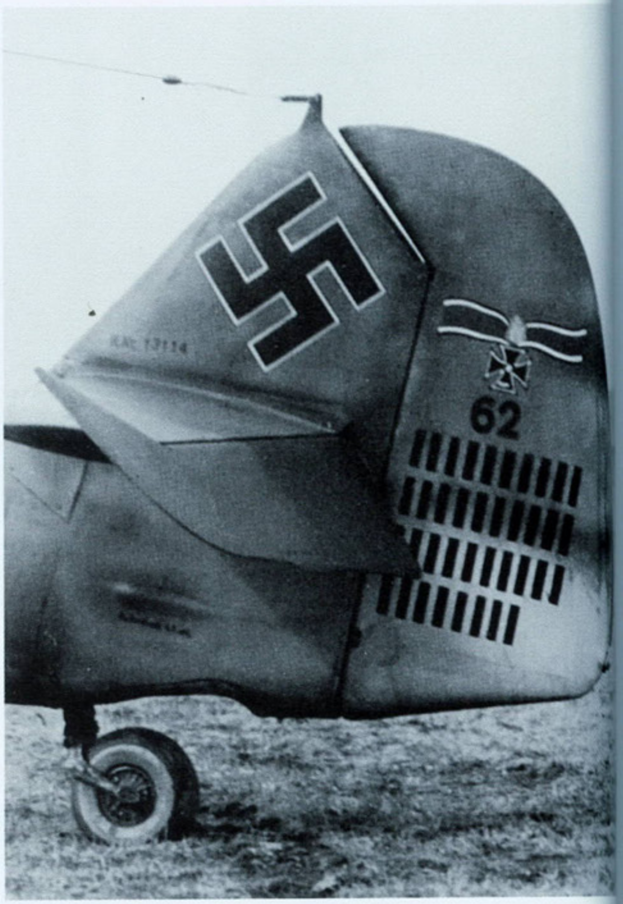
ABOVE AND LEFT Oblt. Max-Hellmuth Ostermann, Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 54, photographed at Siverskaya in May 1942. Note that his Bf 109 F-2, W.Nr. 13114, carries the Staffelkapitän's pennant on the aerial mast and that, although both photographs were taken at the same time, it would seem that the port side of the aircraft still retains traces of its snow camouflage whereas this has been completely stripped from the starboard side. The demarcation line separating the two finishes may be seen running along the top of the fuselage.



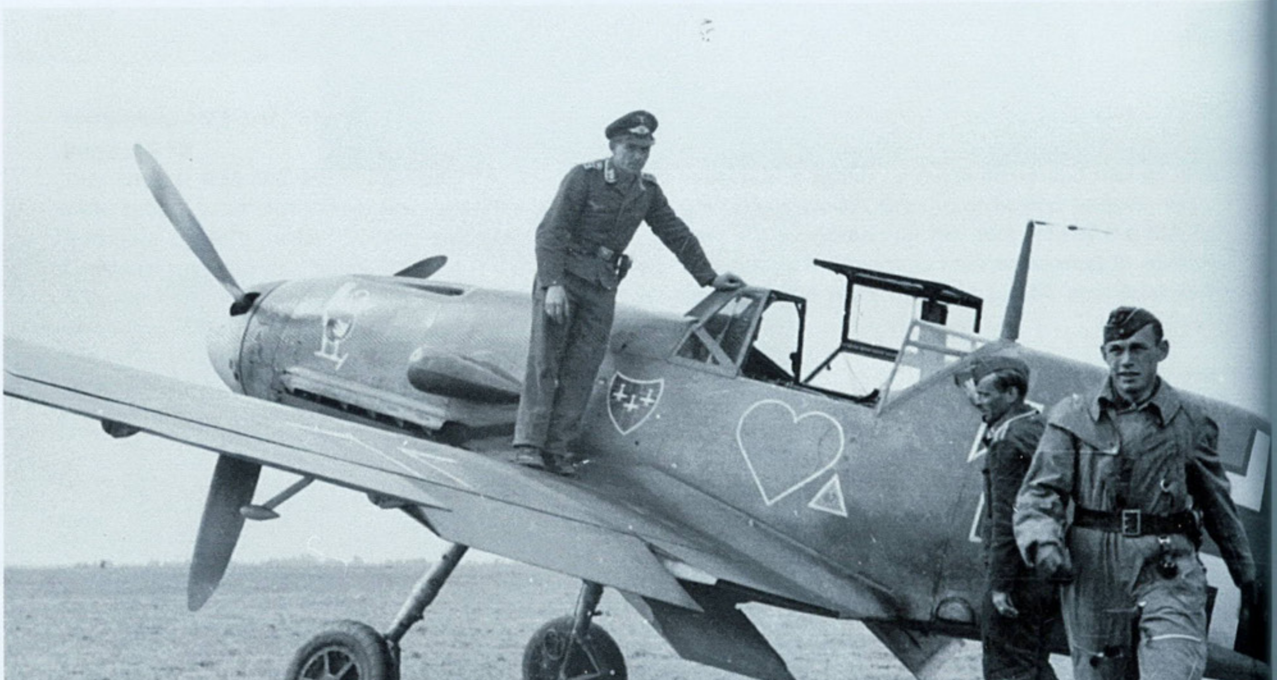
RIGHT: Oblt. Ostermann flew several aircraft coded 'Black 1'. This damaged machine, W.Nr. unknown, is shown after a crash-landing. The rudder at this time recorded 97 victories, the latest claimed on 7 May 1942.



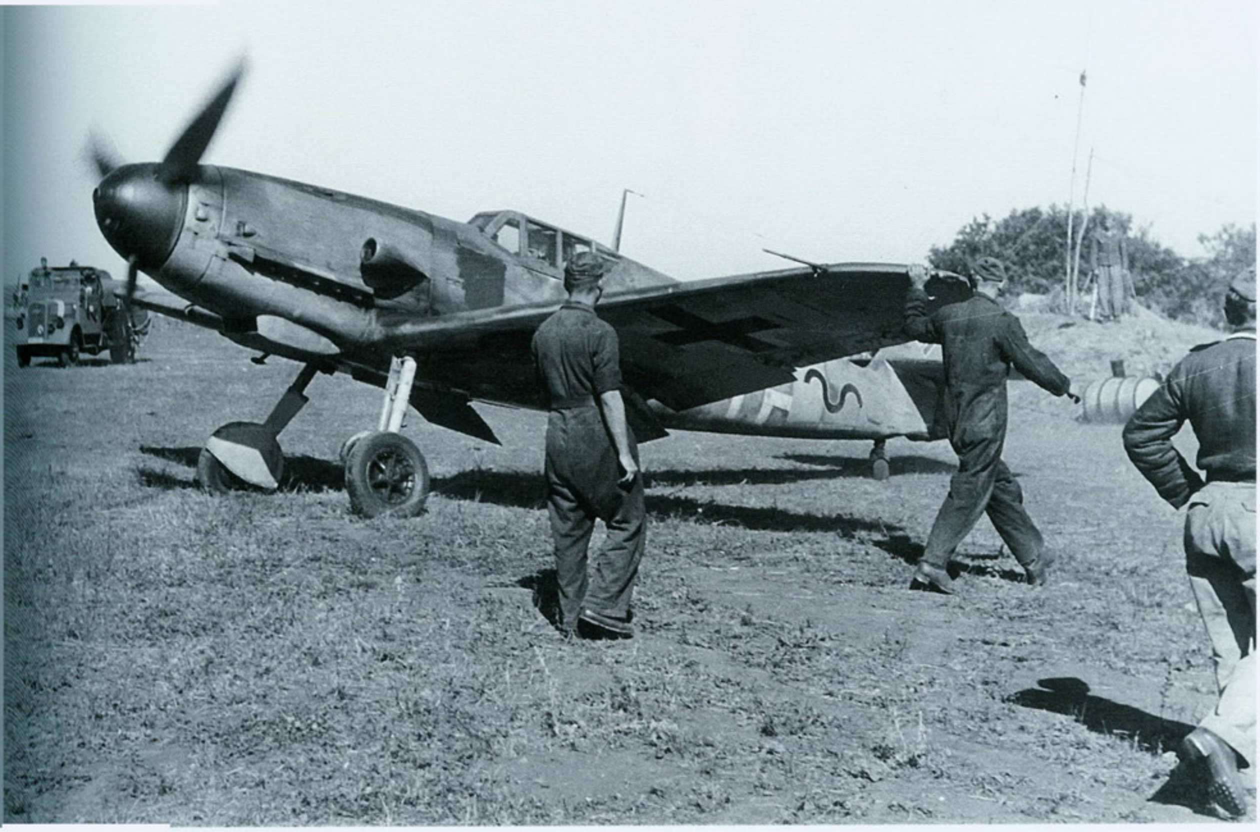
100 victories recorded on the rudder of Bf 109 F, W.Nr. 13114, flown by the Staffelkapitän 8./JG 54, Oblt. Max-Hellmuth Ostermann, at Siverskaya, 12 May 1942



ABOVE: A view of Oblt. Ostermann's W.Nr. 13114 after he shot dow two Soviet P-40s on 12 May, so bringing his tally to 100 victories.

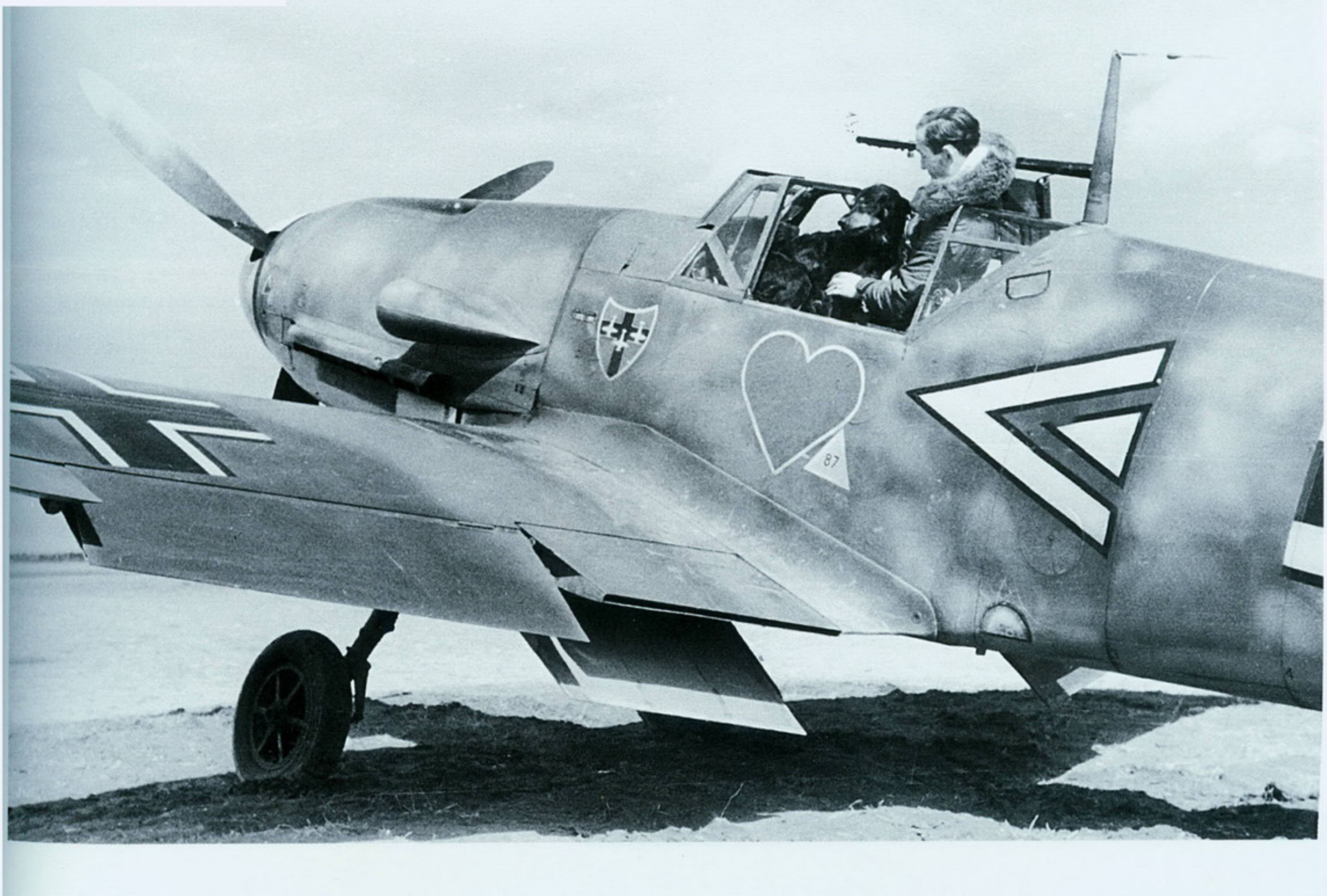


RIGHT: This Bf 109 F, photographed in May 1942, is believed to have been one of the aircraft allocated to Oblt. Max-Hellmuth Ostermann, Staffelkapitän of 8./JG 54, but sometimes flown by other pilots. During the period 1942-43, the aircraft operated by JG 54 were invariably well-decorated and, typically, this machine carries the appropriate Staffel, Gruppe and Geschwader emblems.

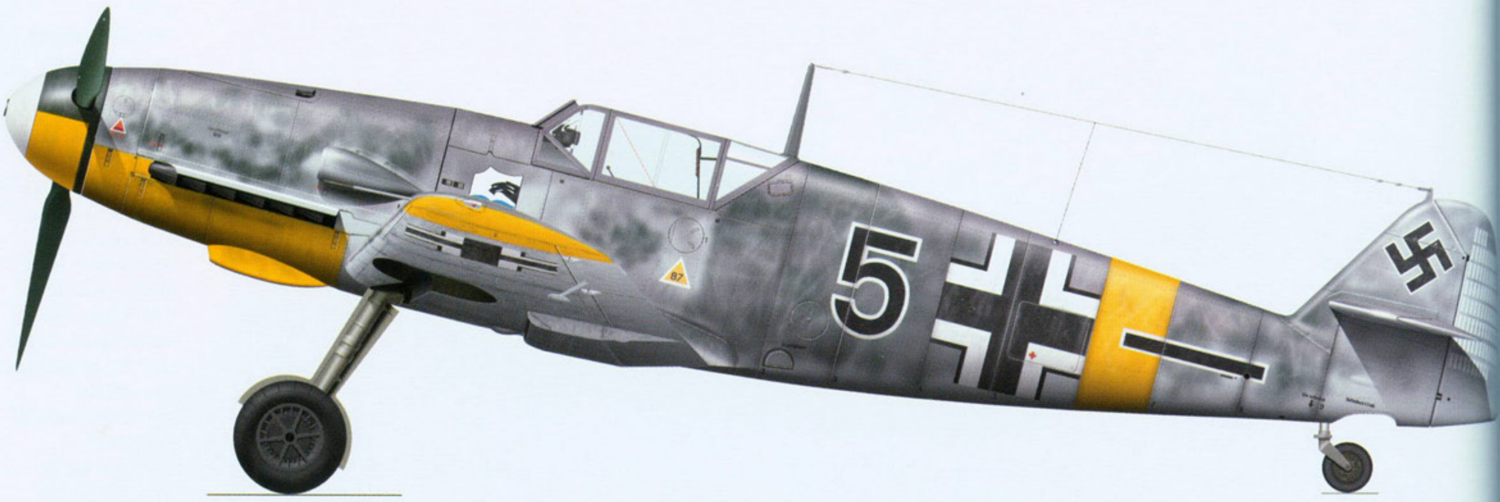


LEFT: Oblt. Ostermann normally flew missions deep into enemy territory and on 9 August, while flying a Bf 109 G, he was bounced by Russian fighters and shot down south of Lake Ilmen. He was 25 years old and had attained a total of 102 victories of which nine were achieved in the West. This Bf 109 G-2, coded 'Black 1', may well have been the one in which he met his death. Note the area under the windscreen where an emblem, probably the III. Gruppe shield, has been painted out.

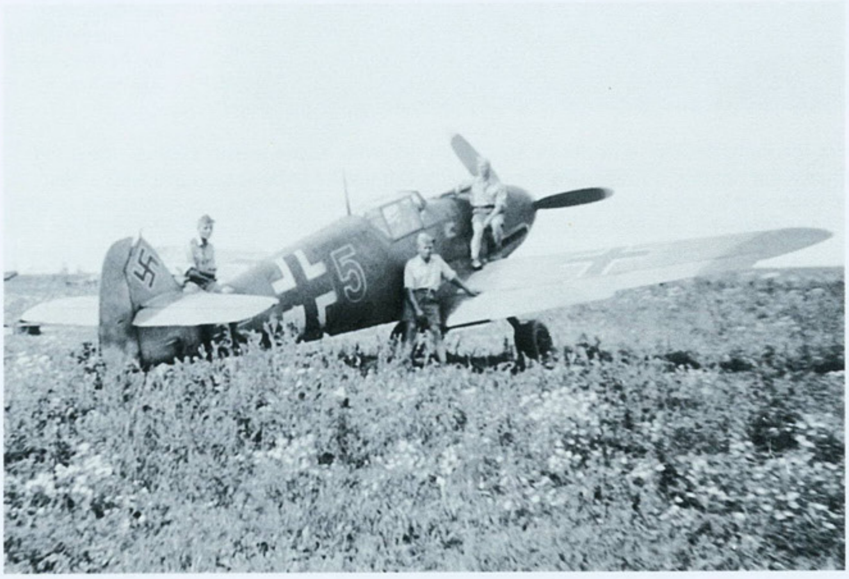
BELOW: This Bf 109 F-4 was flown in 1942 by Hptm. Reinhard Seiler, the Kommandeur of III./JG 54. Apart from the white Kommandeur symbols, the JG 54 'Green Heart' badge and the emblem of III. Gruppe, the aircraft is interesting because it shows that the original green finish has been modified with a light colour, possibly 02 or a light tan. This may be seen in the area of the wing root but the fuselage side gives a clearer indication that a lighter colour was applied after the green camouflage and that the painter has carefully avoided spraying over all other markings.



January-October 1942

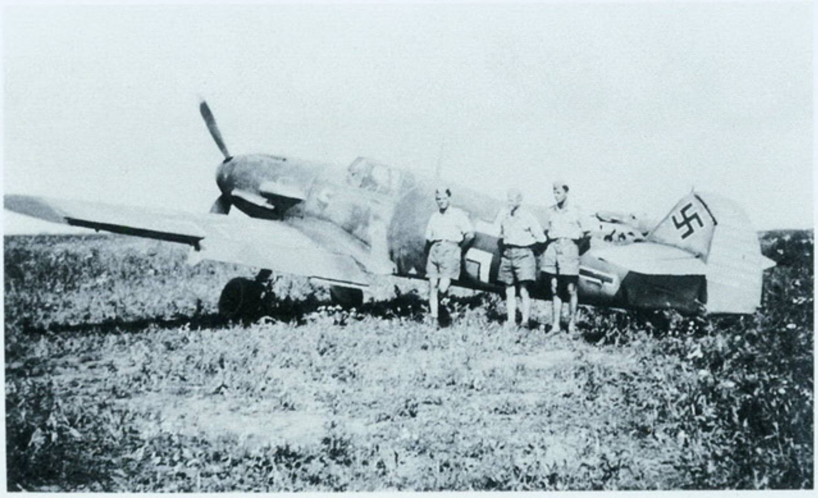


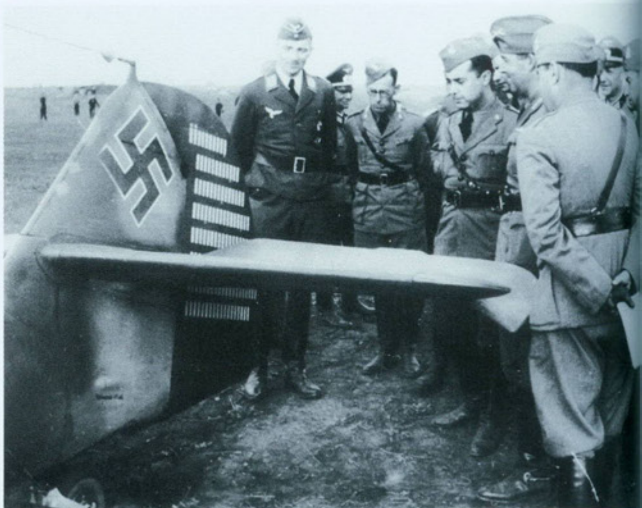
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Black 5' flown by Oblt. Anton Hackl, Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 77, July 1942
On 26 July 1942, Oblt. Hackl destroyed three Il-2 aircraft, bringing his victory tally to 92, and this profile depicts Hackl's machine after the rudder had been painted with the latest victory bars which, it would seem, were applied only to the port side of the rudder. The badge of II./JG 77 appeared below the cockpit and this aircraft's 74/75/76 camouflage had a slightly weathered appearance.



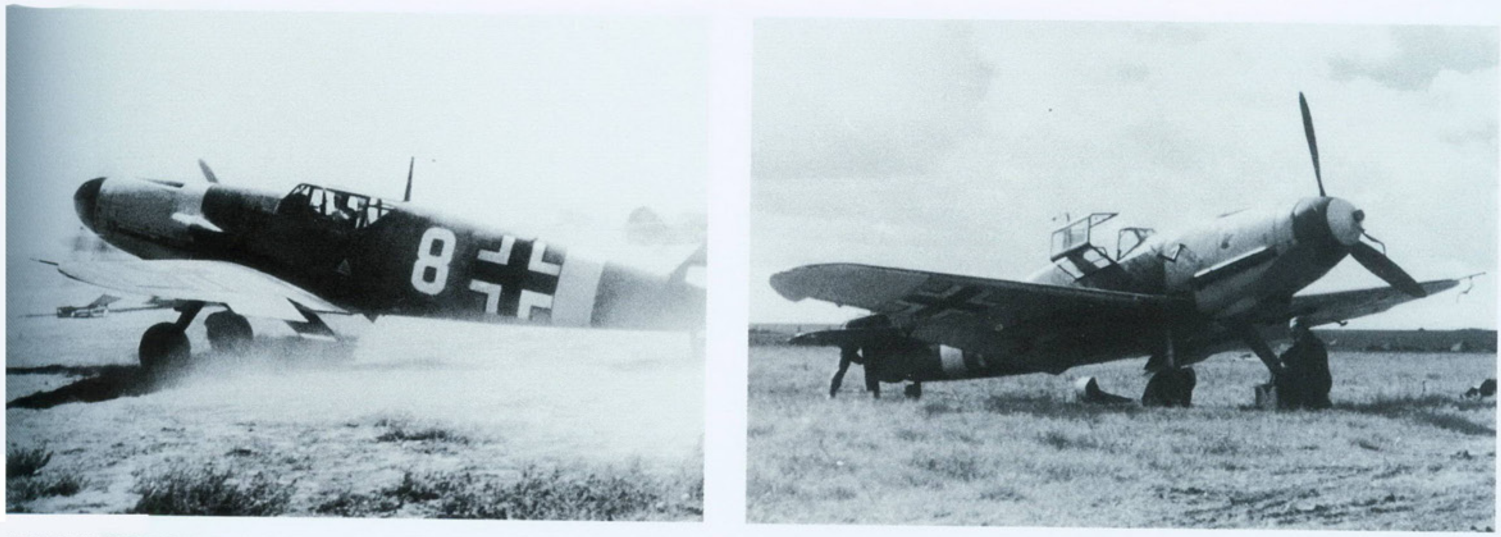
LEFT: This Bf 109 F-4, 'Black 5', photographed at Oktyabrskoye in the Crimea in June 1942, was flown by the Staffelkapitän of 5./JG 77, Oblt. Anton Hackl, seen standing by the wing root and (*RIGHT*) wearing the Knight's Cross awarded on 27 May 1942 after 48 victories.

BELOW: A further photograph of the same aircraft shown on 3 August 1942 after Hackl claimed his 100th victory, a Pe-2 shot down early that morning. In the evening of the same day, Hackl shot down two Il-2s, bringing his tally to 102.

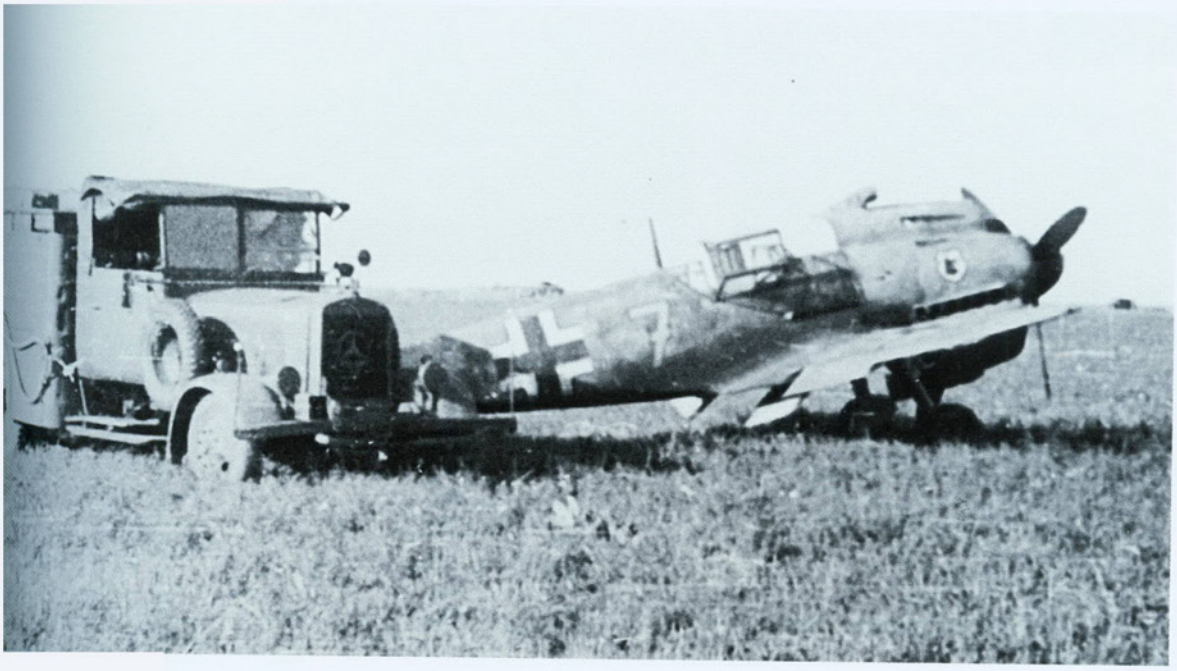




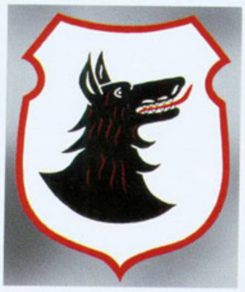
ABOVE: Taken in September 1942, this photograph shows the rudder of another of Hackl's aircraft, now marked with at least 126 victory bars, being inspected by Hungarian staff officers.



ABOVE LEFT AND ABOVE RIGHT: These Bf 109 Fs of III./JG 77 were photographed in the Crimea during the early Summer of 1942, shortly before the Gruppe converted to the Bf 109 G. Note the all-yellow cowling is unusual as, by mid-1942, most units had camouflaged the cowling top and sides leaving only the underside yellow as an identity marking.

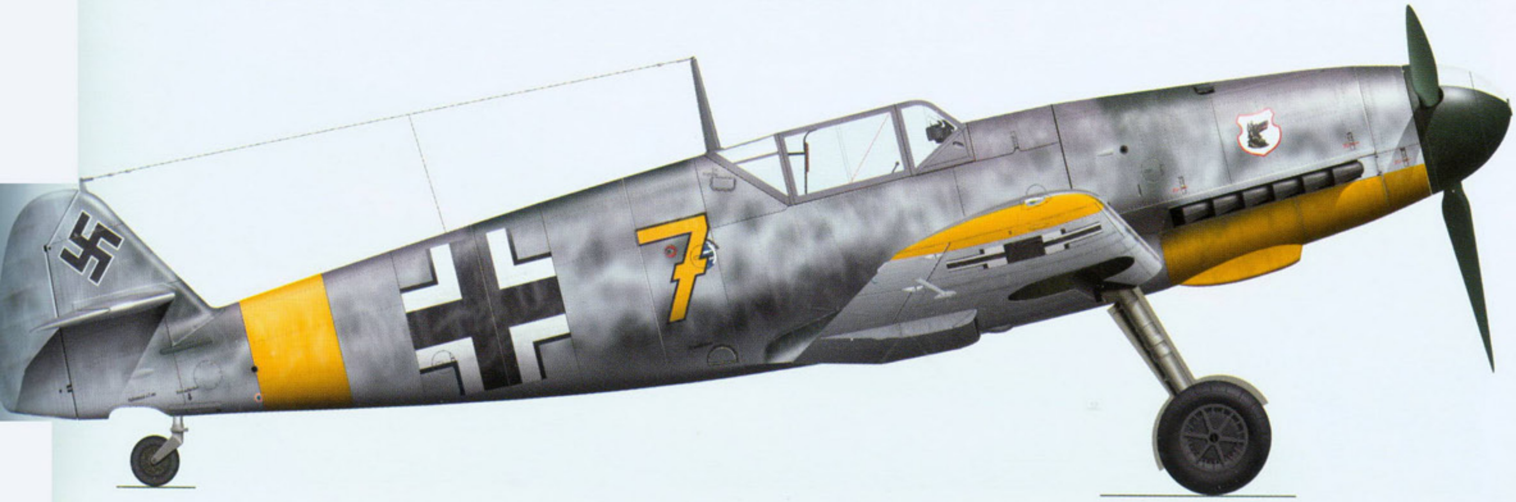


LEFT: 'Yellow 7', a Bf 109 F-2 of 9./JG 77 in June 1942. In October, after conversion to the Bf 109 G was completed, the Gruppe transferred to North Africa and by November, the entire JG 77 was operating in the Mediterranean theatre.

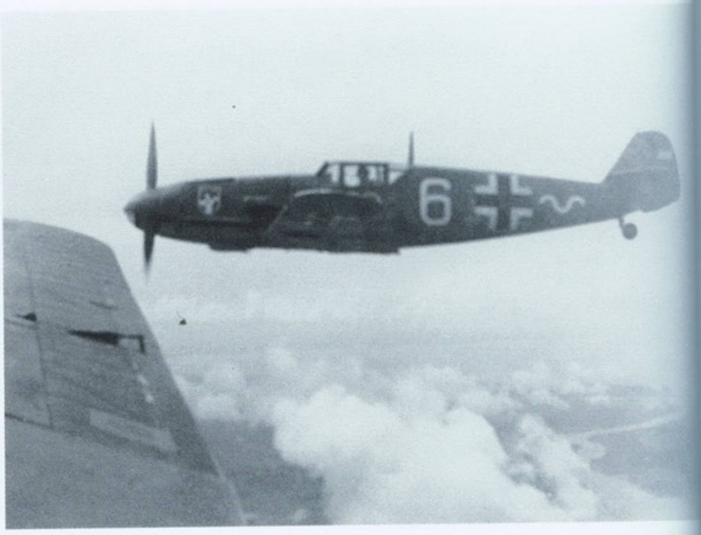


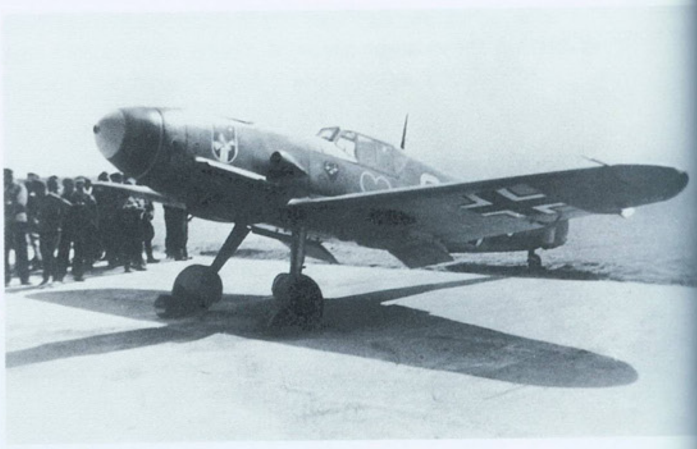
Badge of III./JG 77

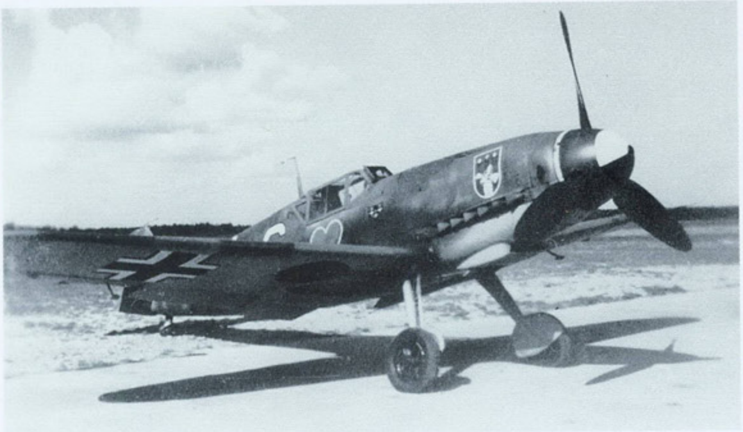
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 'Yellow 7' of 9./JG 77, June 1942
Shown with Eastern Front theatre markings in yellow RLM 04 beneath the nose, under the wingtips and around the rear fuselage, this aircraft carried a slightly faded 74/75/75 camouflage scheme and the badge of III./JG 77 on its cowling. The green RLM 70 spinner had a one-third white segment.

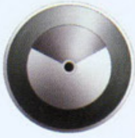


Several views of 'White 6', the Bf 109 F flown by Oblt. Werner Pichon-Kalau vom Hofe (*LEFT*). The original badge of 7./JG 54 was a winged clog but, as shown in these photographs, it was later superimposed upon the badge of Hamburg, vom Hofe's home town, when he himself took over the Staffel. The photograph *(RIGHT)* shows 'White 6' flying as bomber escort, while the view (*BELOW AND RIGHT*) clearly show the extent of the yellow paint applied under the wingtips of this machine.

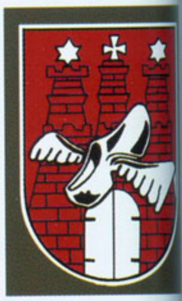








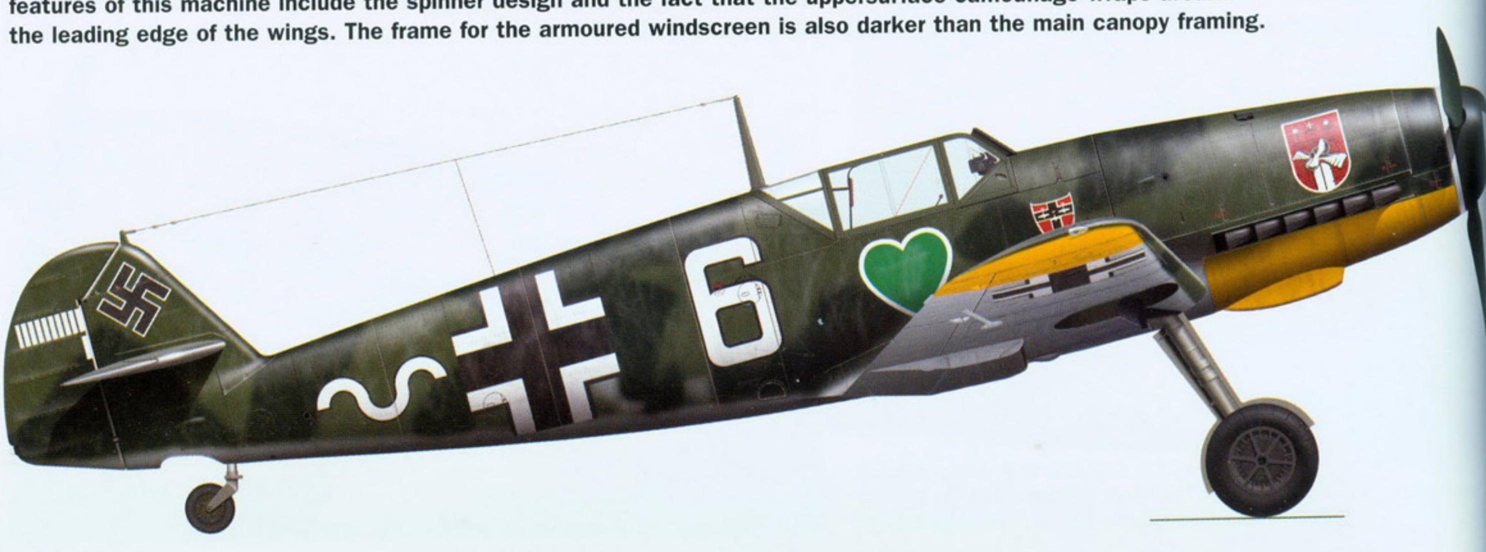
Spinner detail

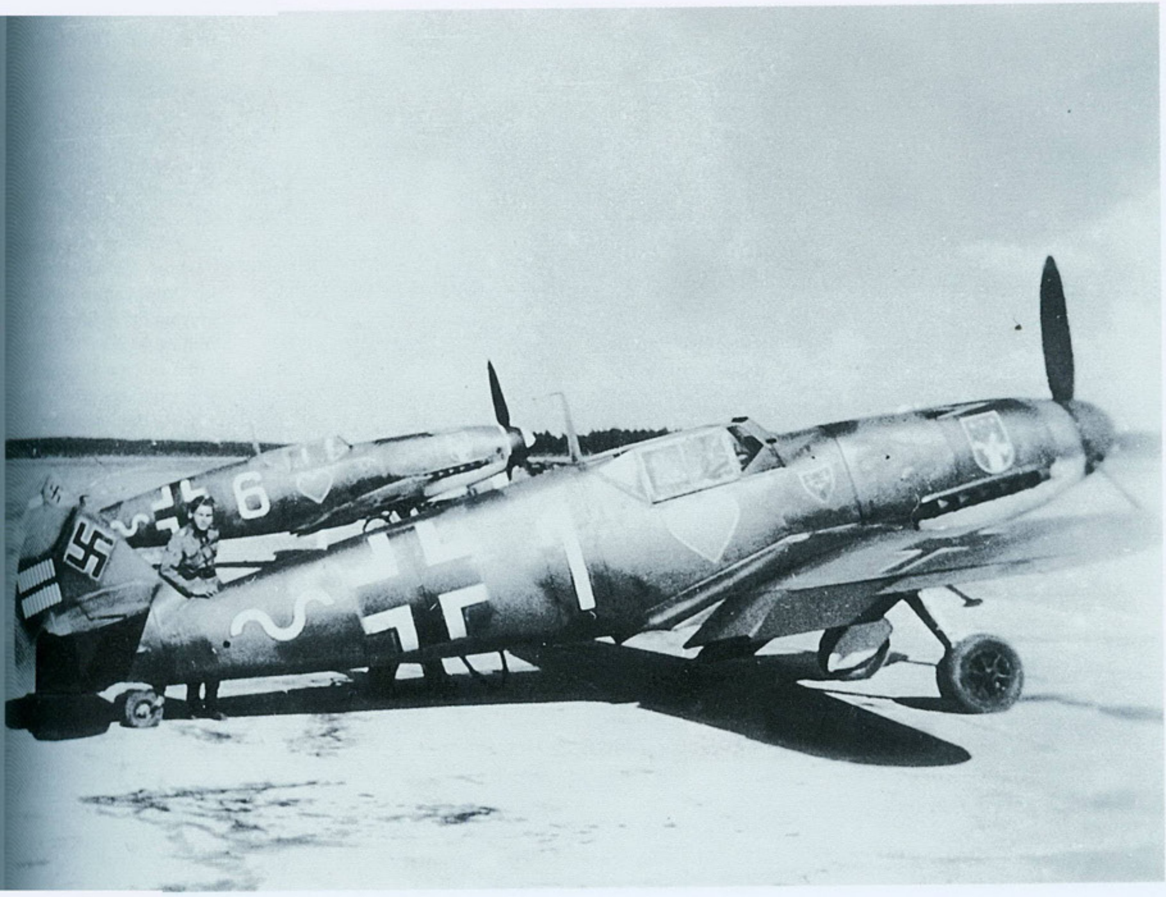


Badge of 7./JG 5

Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 'White 6' flown by Oblt. Werner Pichon-Kalau vom Hofe of 7./JG 54, June 1942

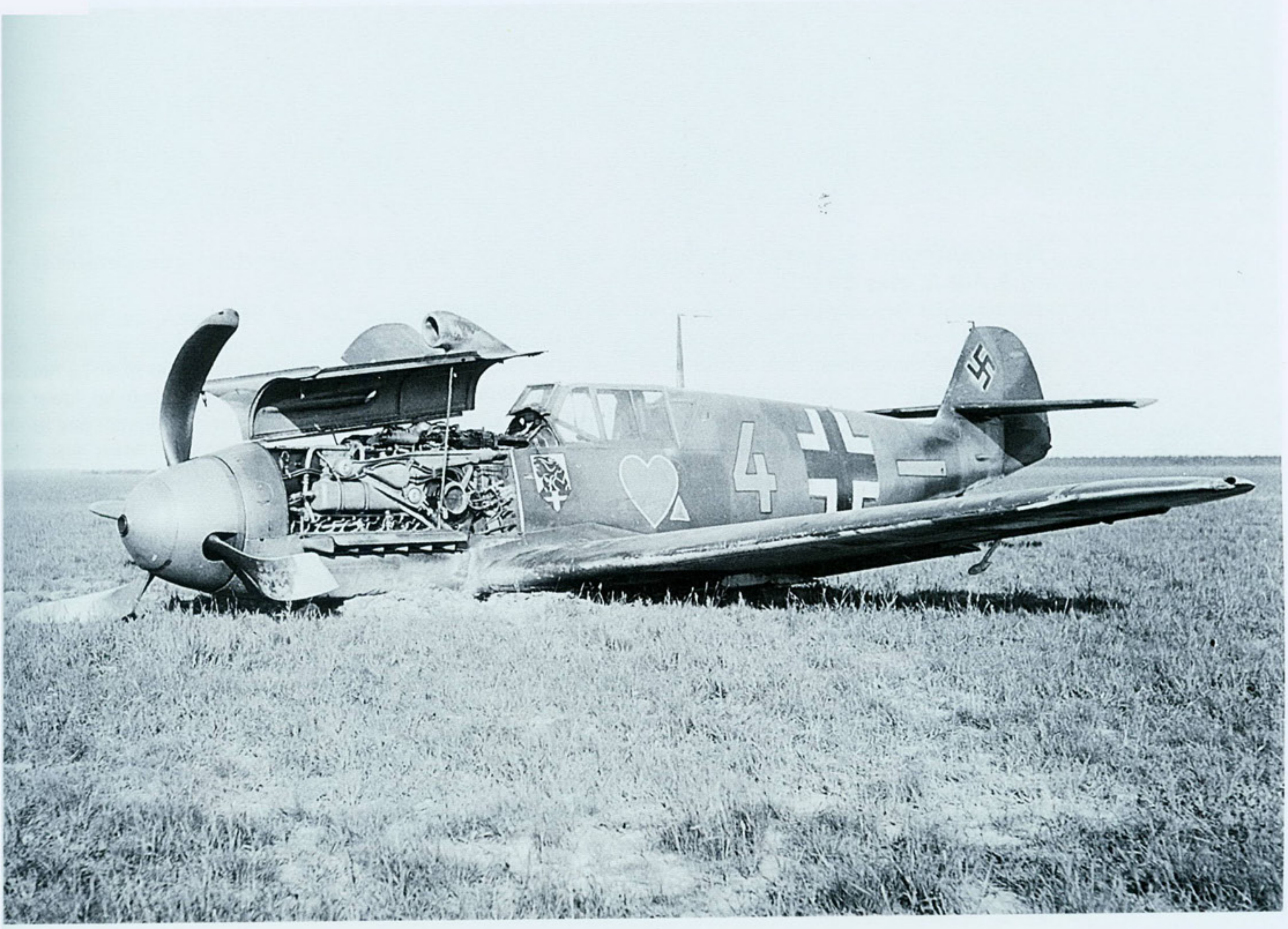
'White 6' is believed to have been finished in a two-tone green scheme of the RLM colours 70 and 71 with 76 undersurfaces. Note that while this machine has a standard yellow cowling beneath the nose, there is no evidence of a yellow fuselage band but the yellow beneath the wingtips extends as far as the Balkenkreuz. Other interesting features of this machine include the spinner design and the fact that the uppersurface camouflage wraps around the leading edge of the wings. The frame for the armoured windscreen is also darker than the main canopy framing.

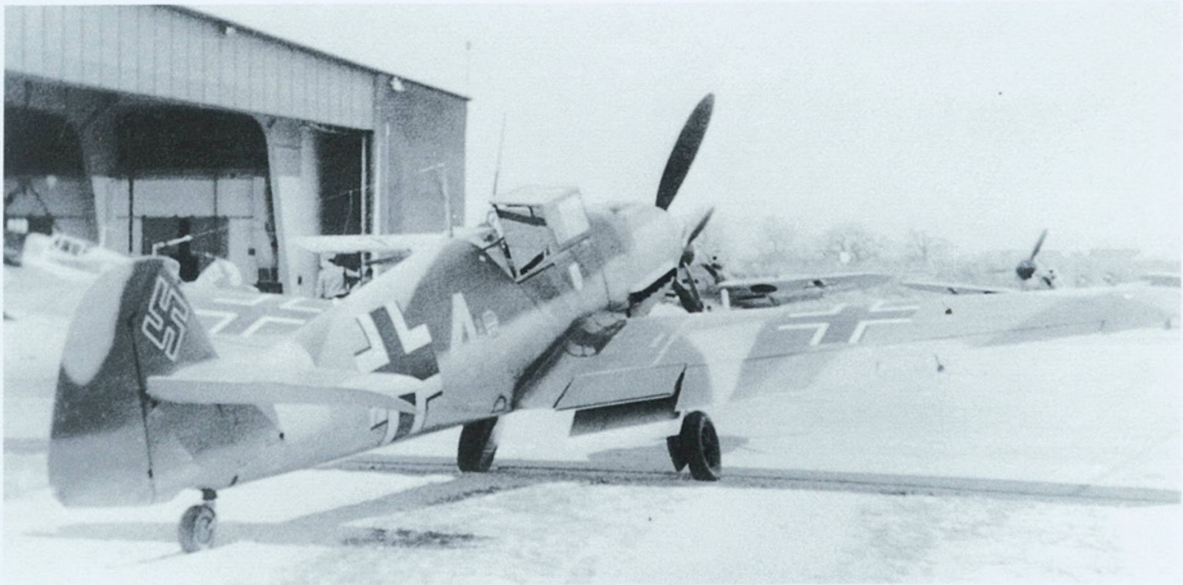




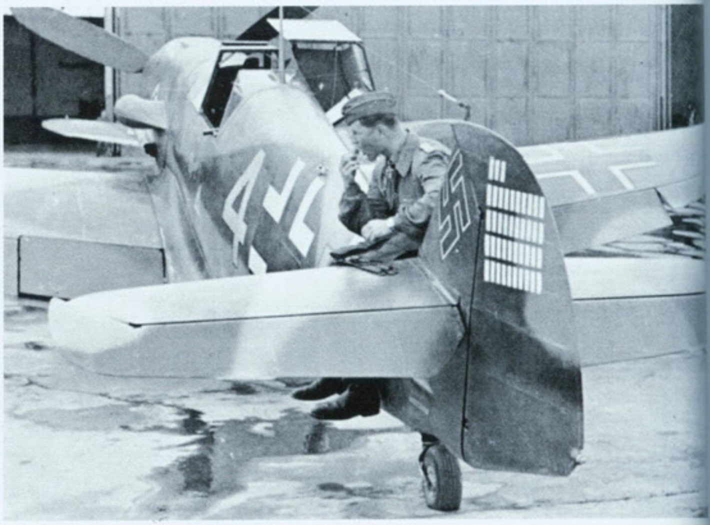
LEFT: Two Bf 109 Fs of 7./JG 54 in mid-1942. In the foreground is 'White 1' which was flown by Lt. Friedrich Rupp who, at this time, had 20 victories. Rupp was later awarded the Ritterkreuz on 24 January 1943 with 50 victories and increased his score to 52 before being killed in the West on 19 June 1943, almost exactly a year after this photograph was taken. The machine in the background, 'White 6', was Oblt. Werner Pichon-Kalau vom Hofe's, also shown opposite.

BELOW: This 'Yellow 4' of 6./JG 54 was photographed on 27 June 1942 and is believed to be W.Nr. 13100 which was 35% destroyed in a take-off accident at Relbitsy the previous day. If this is correct, the aircraft was a Bf 109 F-4/R1, the final suffix indicating that the aircraft had been fitted with an ETC 500/IXb bomb rack for the fighter-bomber role.



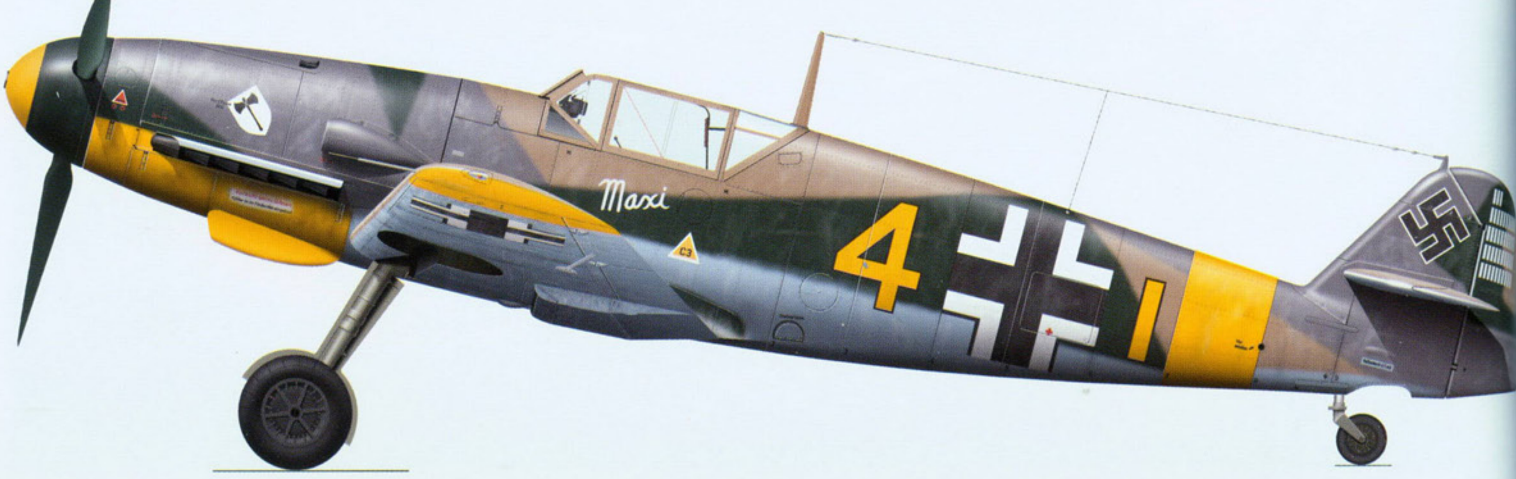


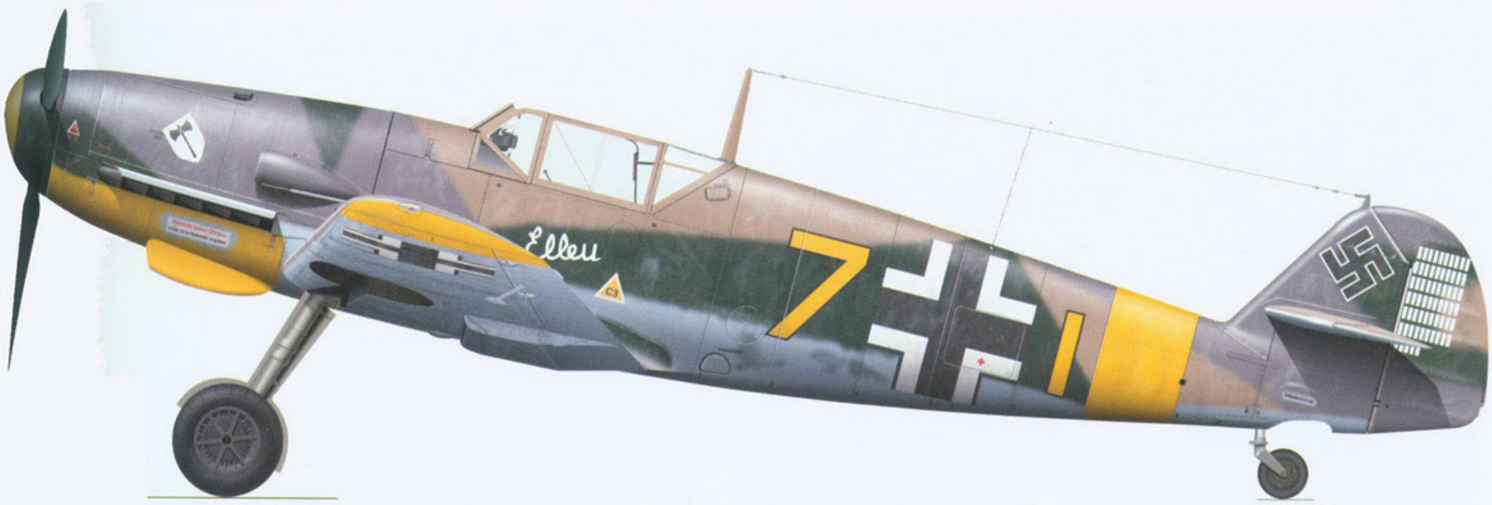
THIS PAGE: This unusual camouflage scheme is believed to have been appli to all the Bf 109 Fs of 9./JG and possibly the aircraft of the whole III. Gruppe, although it is not known whether this was a speciall requested factory-applied finish or was carried out b the Gruppe itself while refitting in Germany. 'Yellow 4', W.Nr. 13220, was flown by Ofw. Eberhard von Boremski, seen here (*BELO* wearing the Ritterkreuz awarded on 3 May 1942. At the time of the award von Boremski had 43 victories, shown on the rudder of his aircraft which also had the name 'Maxi' painted under t cockpit on the port side on



Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Yellow 4', W.Nr. 13220 flown by Ofw. Eberhard von Boremski of 9./JG 3, May 1942

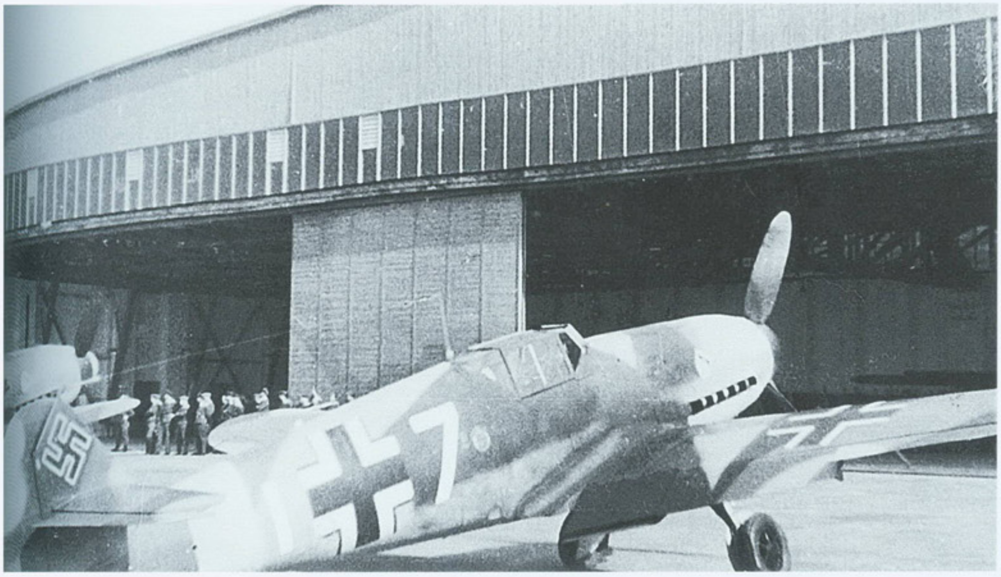
The basis for this camouflage scheme may have been that the aircraft was one of a batch originally due for service in North Africa. The camouflage was adapted for the terrain in Russia with large angular patches being added over the original camouflage, believed to have been RLM 79 Sandgelb on the uppersurfaces and RLM 78 Hellblau on the undersurfaces. The additional colours may have been RLM 70 and RLM 75. The tip of the spinner, lower engine cowling, wingtip undersurface and fuselage band were all in Gelb 04, as was the aircraft number and III. Gruppe ba A total of 43 white victory bars appeared only on the port side of the rudder and the name 'Maxi' was painted under the cockpit.

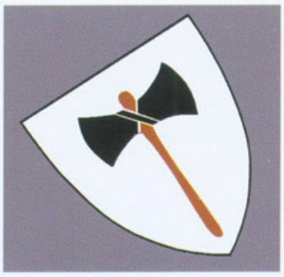




Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Yellow 7', W.Nr. 13325 flown by Oblt. Viktor Bauer, Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 3, Frolov, near Stalingrad, June 1942

As with 'Yellow 4' shown previously, this aircraft is finished in a hybrid scheme of RLM 70 and 75 over RLM 79 Sandgelb but is depicted a month later when Oblt. Bauer had 65 victories, as marked in the rudder. It is believed the undersurfaces were RLM 78.



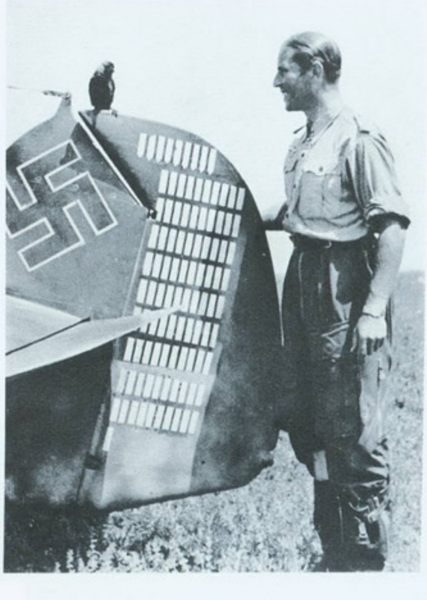


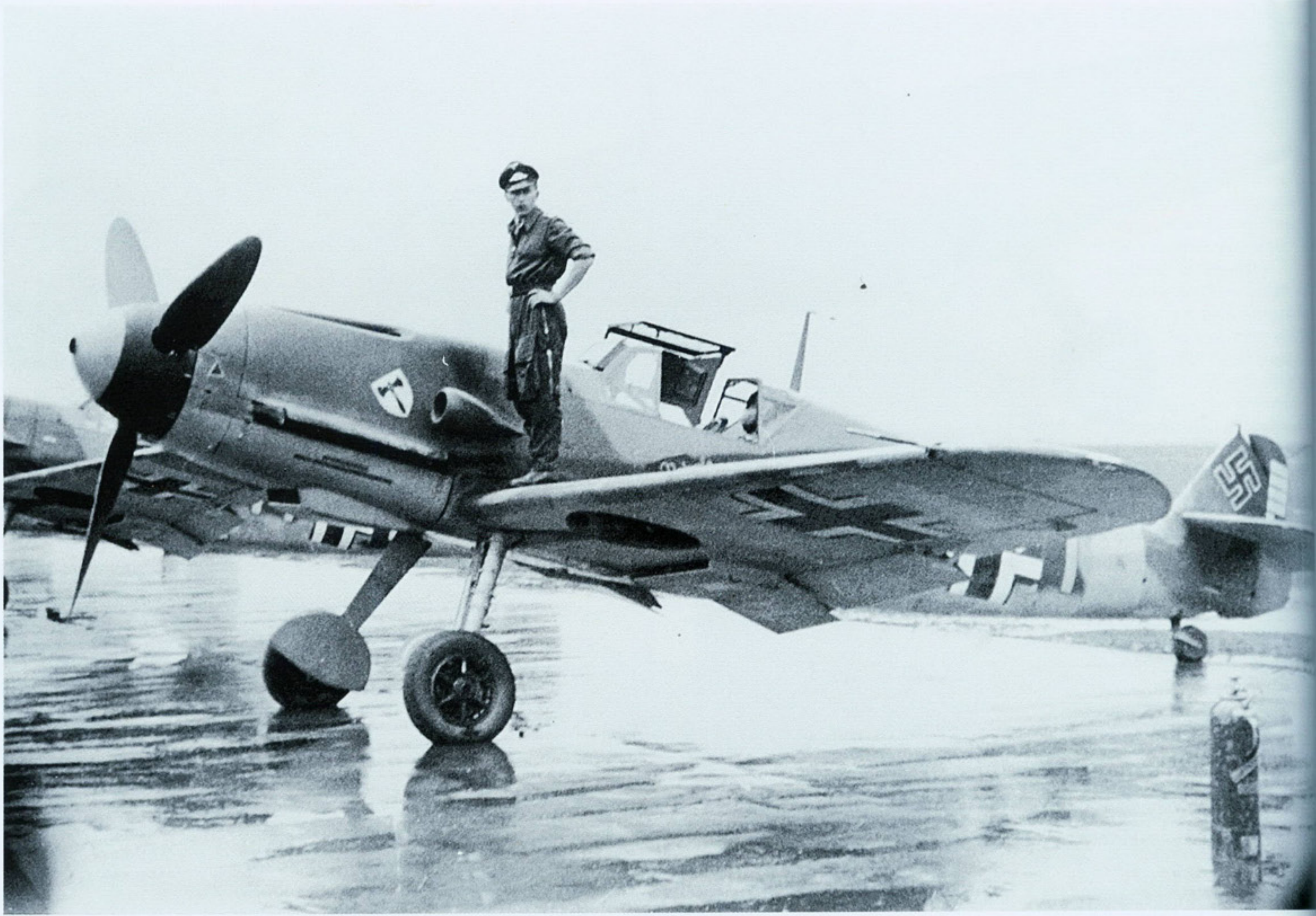
3./JG 3 badge

LEFT: The starboard side of Viktor Bauer's Bf 109 F-4, 'Yellow 7', shows that the camouflage pattern of all III. Gruppe aircraft was almost identical, lending weight to the theory that perhaps this scheme was factory-applied. It is known that when aircraft were destined for delivery to a particular unit there was some contact between the unit and the factory when special modifications to equipment, armament and camouflage were requested. This practice was abolished later in the war.

OVE: Oblt. Viktor Bauer with his Bf 109 F-4 'Yellow 7', W.Nr. 13325, on 0 June 1942. At this time the aircraft was marked with 65 victory bars n the rudder.

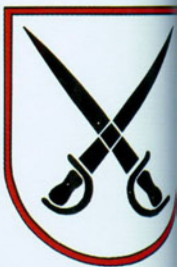
RIGHT: Oblt. Viktor Bauer, Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 3, photographed at Frolov, near Stalingrad, on 22 July 1942. At this time, Bauer was credited with 91 aerial victories plus nine destroyed on the ground. Bauer, who received his Knight's Cross on 30 July 1941, received the Oak Leaves on 26 July 1942 but was wounded on 10 August and withdrawn from combat. He then served with various training and quasi-operational replacement units and shot down four aircraft in the West before the end of the war. Meanwhile, on 4 September 1942, this aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire which wounded the pilot, Ritterkreuzträger Oblt. Emil Bitsch, and resulted in the aircraft being destroyed.





ABOVE: A name beneath the cockpit was a feature seen on several of JG 3's aircraft. 'Yellow 2' was named 'Peterle' and was flown by Ofw. Otto Wessling, seen standing on the wing, who also had 43 victories when this photograph was taken. He received the Ritterkreuz on 3 September 1942 when his tally had reached 50.

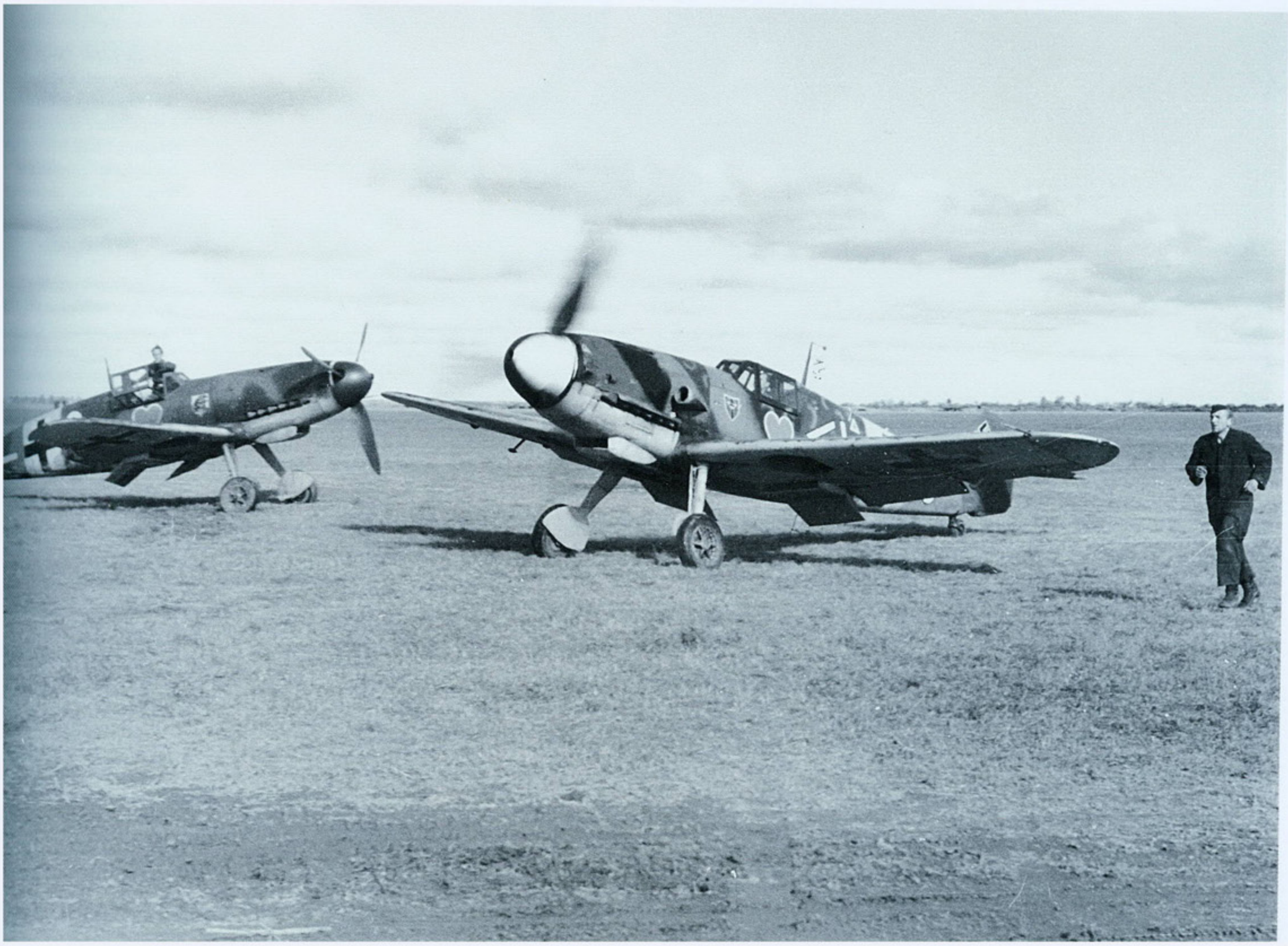
LEFT: 'Yellow 2' of 3. Staffel showing the Gruppe's crossed swords badge on the fuselage and on the engine cowling, the 'Winged U' badge, first adopted at the end of 1941 when the Geschwader received the honour-title 'Jagdgeschwader Udet'



Badge of I./JG 3

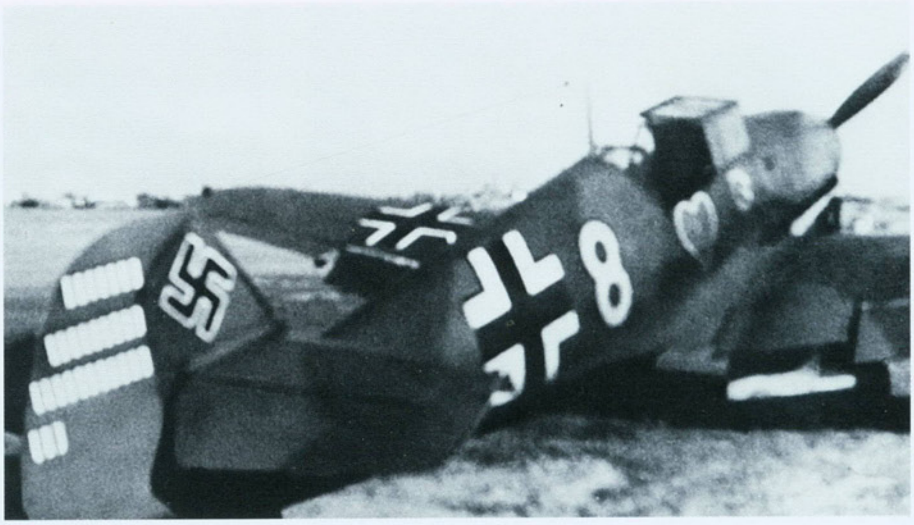
ABOVE: For most of 1941 and early 1942, Fw. Alfred Grislawski of 9./JG 52 flew as wingman to Hermann Graf of 9./JG 52. Grislawski claimed his first victory on 1 September 1941, but in the Crimea in late April 1942 increased his tally from 18 to 42 in four weeks. Here, Fw. Grislawski is seen being decorated with the Ritterkreuz, awarded on 1 July 1942.

ABOVE: By the time Fw. Grislawski received the Ritterkreuz, Graf - seen here on the left - had received the Swords. Graf and Grislawski were firm friends and both survived the war, Graf with 212 victories and Grislawski with 132.



ABOVE: The non-standard two-tone green scheme employed by JG 54 may be clearly seen on these Bf 109 Fs. The aircraft on the left carries a horizontal bar aft of the fuselage Balkenkreuz indicating that it belonged to II. Gruppe, and has this Gruppe's Lion of Aspern badge ahead of the windscreen, while the aircraft on the right carries the badge and, just visible, the wavy bar of III. Gruppe. Note also that this aircraft has a patch of darker green on the engine cowling.

RIGHT: This Bf 109 F, 'White 8', was flown by Lt. Walter Nowotny of 3./JG 54 and is shown with 30 victory bars, the last five all being claimed on 20 July 1942. Although 'White 8' is finished in the dark green camouflage scheme typical of JG 54, it is unusual in not having the normal yellow fuselage band.

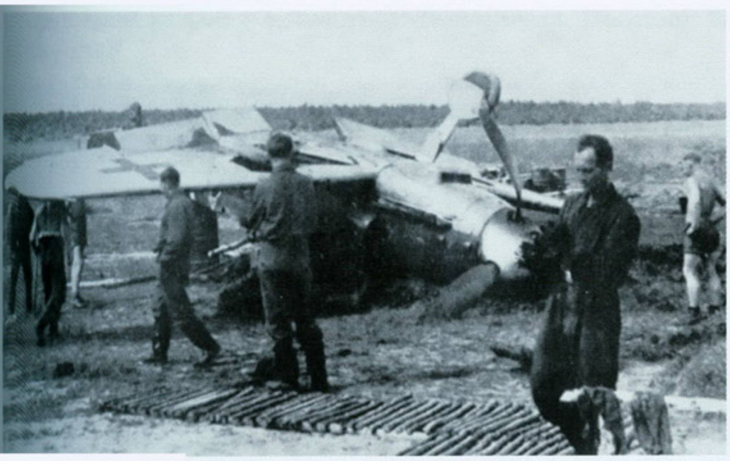


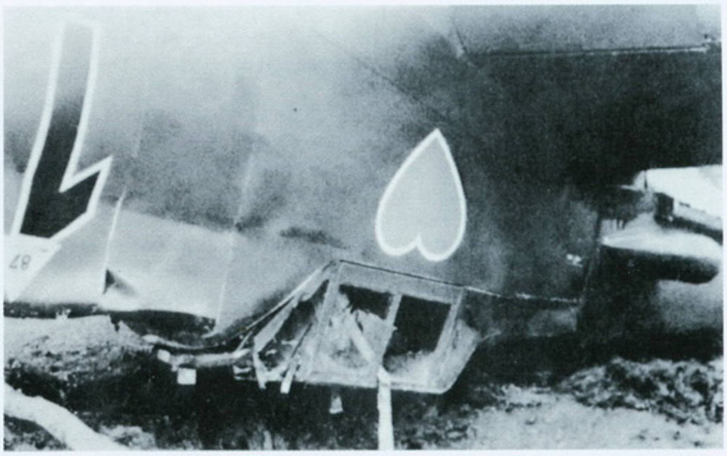
BELOW: On 2 August 1942 Nowotny shot down 7 enemy aircraft in one day, these being his 48th to 54th victories. He is seen here being congratulated by his ground personnel and demonstrating with his hands how the action took place.

BELOW LEFT: On 21 Augus Nowotny was awarded the German Cross in Gold, and o 4 September received the Knight's Cross, both of whic decorations Nowotny is wearing in this photograph

BELOW: To celebrate the award of the Ritterkreuz, his ground crew organised a par which was held in the Offic Mess at Gatschina Castle. Als invited were several officers from the unit including the Kommandeur of I. Gruppe, Hptm. Philipp (seated lookin up at board), and Hptm. Haa to his right.

RITTERKREUZES
ZUM EISERNEN KREUZ
Ihrem Lt. Nowotny

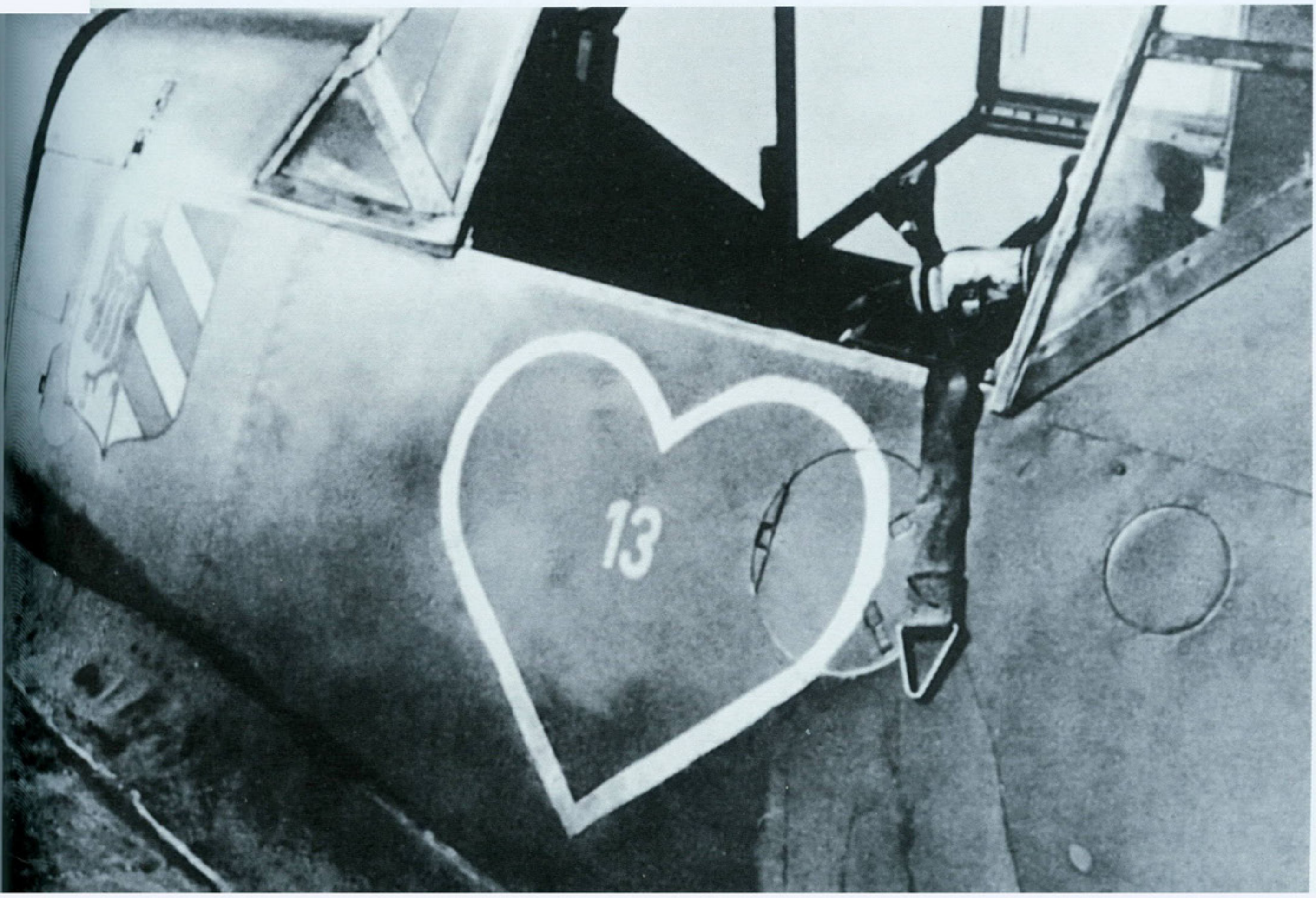




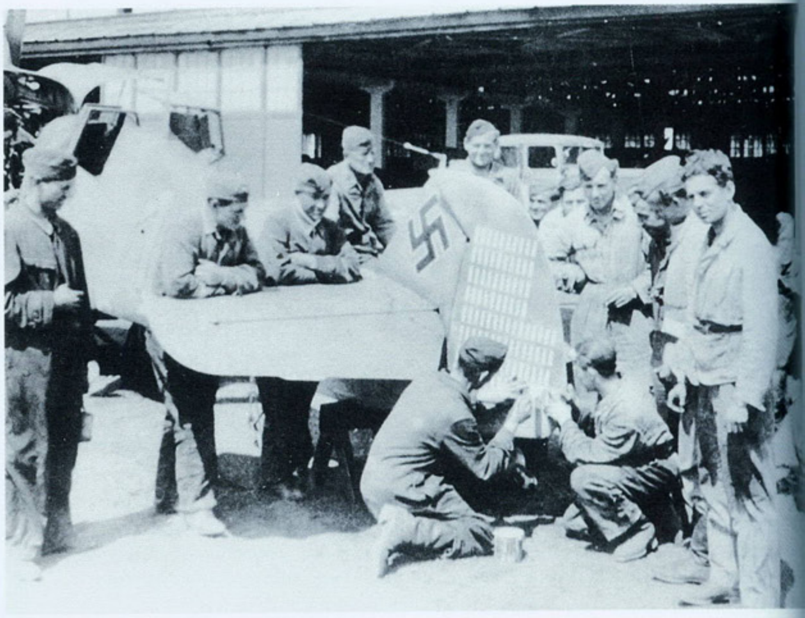
ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: During the Summer of 1942, Lt. Walter Nowotny was involved in an air battle during which he shot down two Soviet fighters. However, his aircraft was hit by cannon fire which damaged the fuselage fuel tank and the area below the cockpit. With his Bf 109 G-2 'Black 1' thus severely damaged, Nowotny flew home but his engine cut out while he was still approaching the airfield. The aircraft rapidly lost height and struck an airfield defence flak installation, overturned, and came to rest on its back. It took rescuers 20 minutes to release Nowotny from the cockpit.

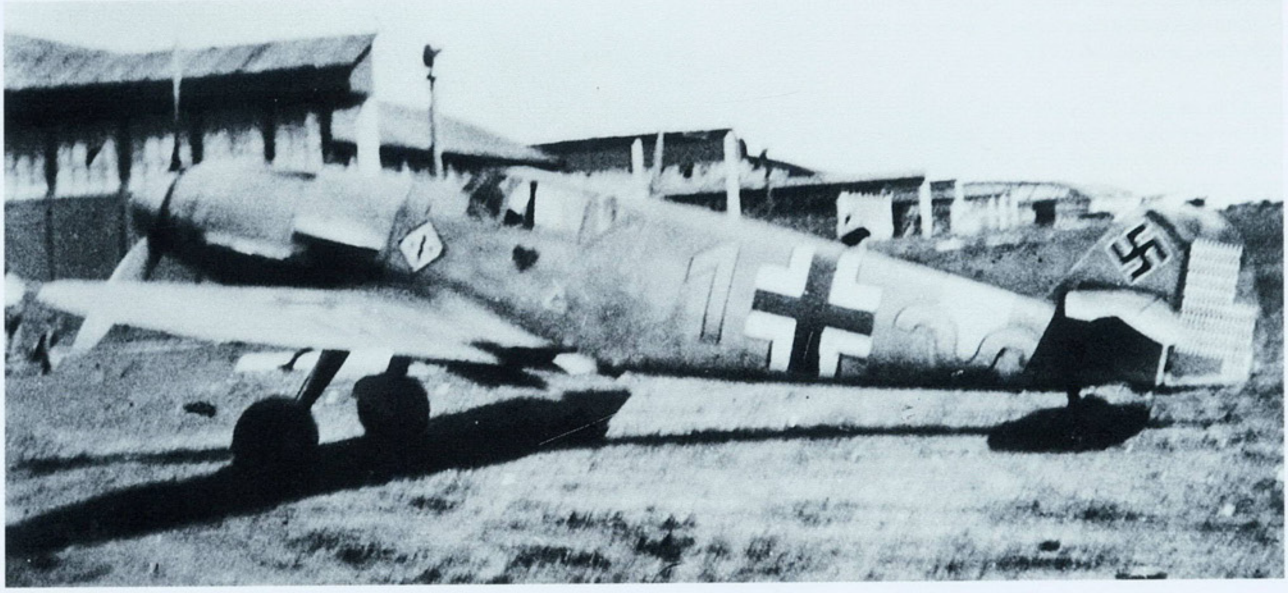
RIGHT: Nowotny, (right) in contemplative mood, was promoted to Staffelkapitän of the 1. Staffel on 25 October 1942 when Oblt. Heinz Lange (left) was transferred to JG 51 which, as its last Kommodore, he led until 1945.

ELOW: Nowotny considered the number 13 would bring him good luck and on one of his aircraft this was superimposed upon the JG 54 'Green Heart' badge. The position of the petrol filler cap shows this machine to be a Bf 109 F variant. The yellow octane triangle normally painted beneath the filler cap has been overpainted.



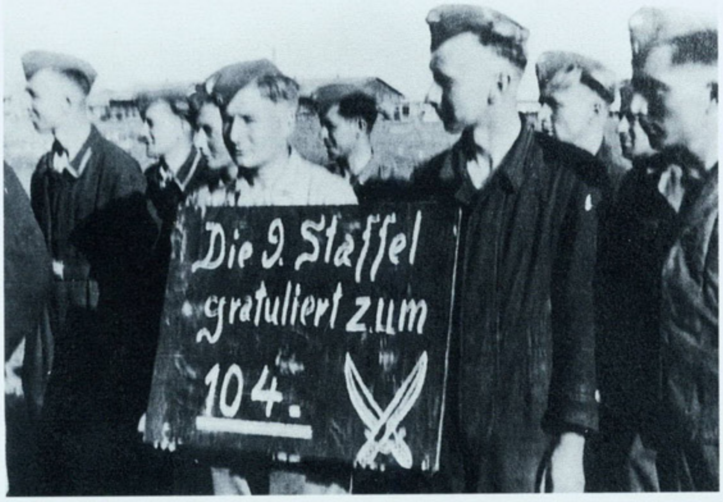
BELOW: In May 1942, Ofw. Ernst Süss of 9./JG 52 found an old Russian gramophone record which he played repeatedly on his portable record player until everyone grew tired of hearing it. The record contained a song, believed to have been Tartar in origin, and although no one could fully understand the lyrics, Süss interpreted the chorus as containing the words "Karaya, Karaya" and sang or hummed the tune constantly. Even in the air, whether on the approach flight, return flight or in combat, Süss could be heard on the radio singing his song. During one battle, Staffelkapitän Graf was unable to make himself heard above Süss's singing and, forgetting all radio discipline, shouted into his microphone: "Attention all Karaya men, gather at 10,000 feet!" Thus, from that moment on, 9./JG 52 became known as the 'Karaya Staffel' and became so well known that even Russian radio operators addressed Graf on the German radio frequency as 'Karaya'. What was not known, until now, however, was the date when the red 'Karaya' heart emblem of 9. Staffel first appeared on the unit's aircraft, but thanks to author and historian Christer Bergström, this mystery has now been solved. Christer identified the airfield at which these photographs were taken as being Kharkov-Rogan, and it is known that after scoring his 97th to 104th victories on 14 May 1942, Lt. Graf stayed at this airfield until the 19 May. Christer's detailed research showed that, in the period from the 14th to 19 May the weather was usually cloudy, and only on the 15th was sunny enough for the strong shadows seen in the photographs to have been cast. Photographs known to have been taken on 14 May show no red heart emblem on Graf's machine, so the emblem must therefore have first appeared on 15 May.



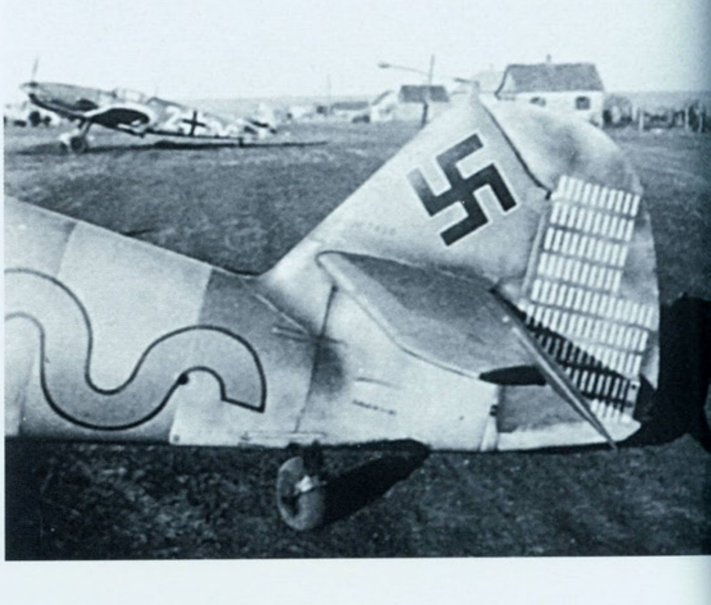


ABOVE: Keeping th
rudder markings on
Hermann Graf's airc
up to date was almo
a full-time job for hi
ground staff, seen he
adding the 97th to
104th victory bar.

BELOW: A close-up
Graf's rudder show
the oversize bar ad
to commemorate h
104th victory.

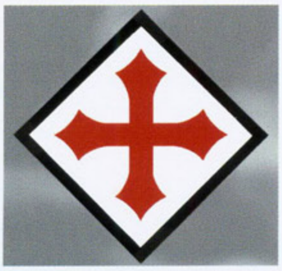


ABOVE: Ground personnel of 9./JG 52 with the sign they produced to congratulate Lt. Hermann Graf on his 104th victory on 14 May 1942.

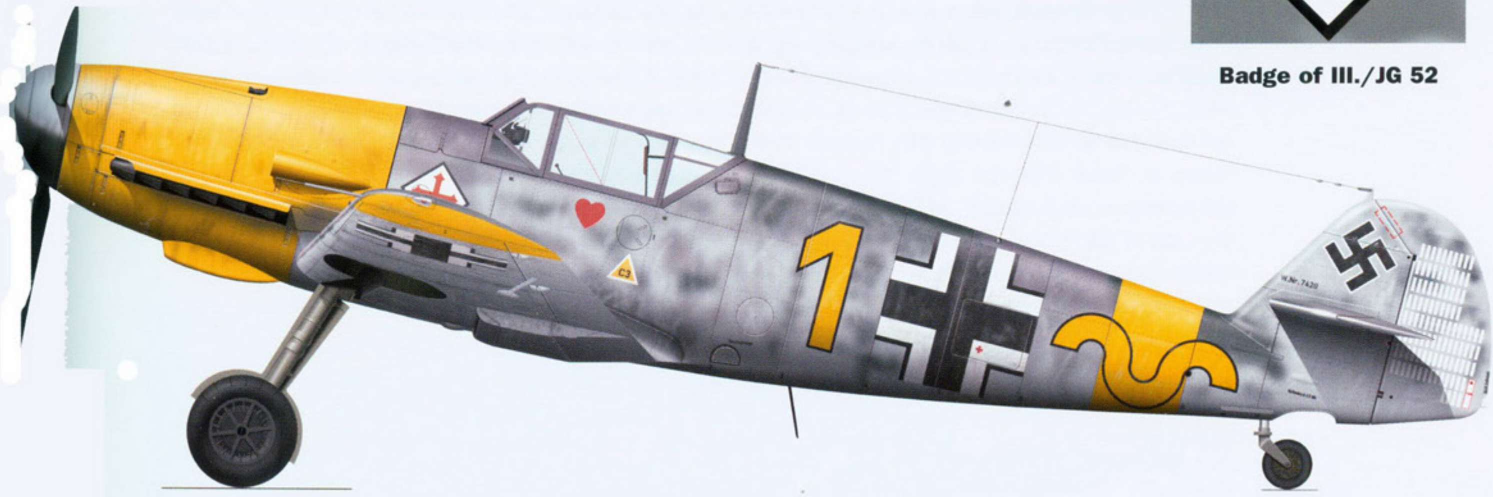


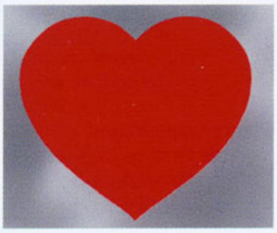
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 'Yellow 1' flown by Lt. Hermann Graf, Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 52, 15 May 1942

Lt. Graf's 'Yellow 1' was finished in a slightly faded 74/75/76 scheme and carried the 'Mikhail Cross' which formed the badge of III./JG 52 and the newly-introduced red 'Karaya' heart emblem of 9. Staffel. The engine cowling was completely yellow and a total of 104 victory bars appeared on the rudder, the last being twice the dimensions of the others, outlined in red, and with a red star at the top and the number 104 marked across its centre.

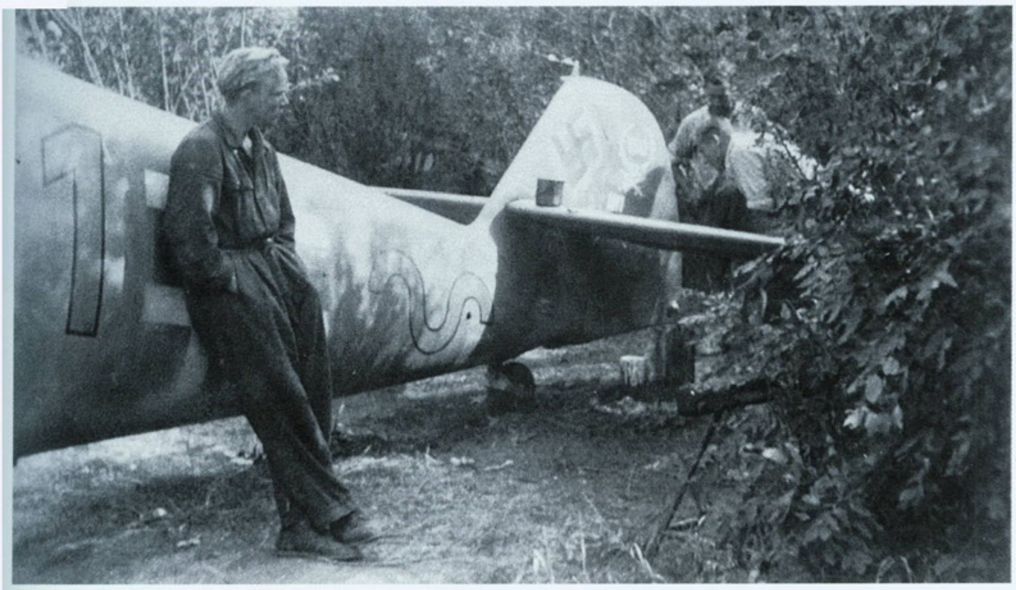


Badge of III./JG 52

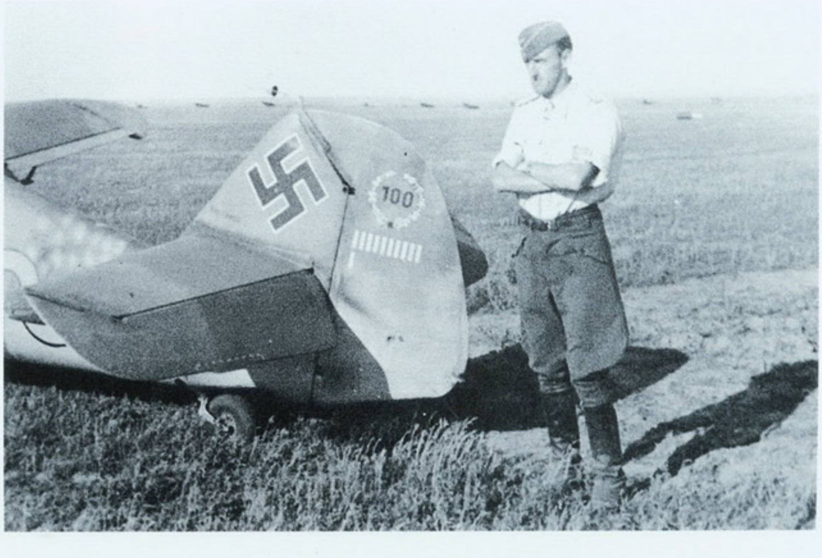




9./JG 52 badge, May 1942

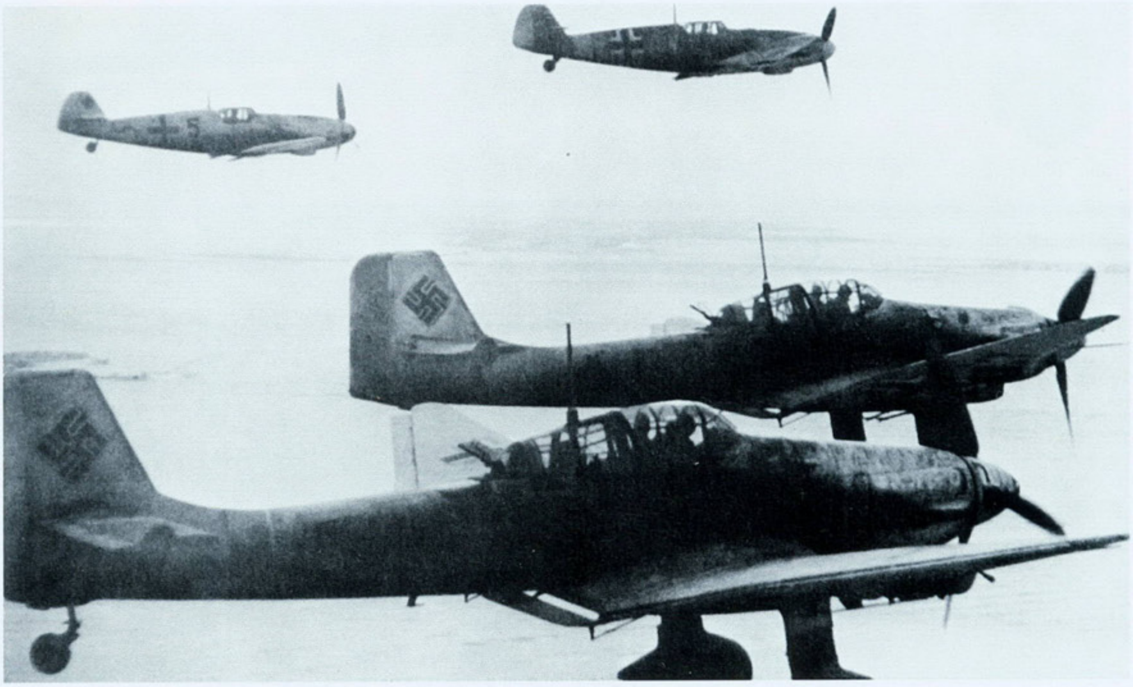


ABOVE AND RIGHT: When there was insufficient space on the rudder for any more victory bars, a new design was applied, these photographs showing the rudders of two more of Graf's aircraft marked (*ABOVE*) with 104 and (*RIGHT*) 111 victories.



Contested Polar Skies

Controlling all German military operations in Norway and Northern Finland was *Generaloberst* Hans-Jürgen Stumpff's *Luftflotte* 5. This air fleet was tactically divided into three parts, of which *Fliegerführer Nord-Ost* was charged with the daily contest for air superiority along the German – Soviet front in north-eastern Laponia. Early 1942 saw the formation under *Luftflotte* 5 of JG 5, a new *Jagdgeschwader* under the command of *Obstlt*. Gotthard Handrick, the modern pentathlon gold medal winner in the 1936 Olympic Games. The II./JG 5 had been formed by redesignating the old *Jagdgruppe zur besonderen Verwendung* and, in early 1942, this was to be the only Bf 109 unit to confront the air forces of Soviet Northern Fleet (VVS SF), 14th Army, and 122 IAD/PVO. Its main task was to provide fighter escort for the Ju 88s of KG 30 and the Ju 87s of I./St.G. 5 (formerly IV./LG 1), both of which raided the port of Murmansk and the Kirov railway, two important strategic goals which German and Finnish troops had been unable to seize. II./JG 5 reported a strength of 18 serviceable Bf 109 Es on 10 January 1942. These were supported by the Bf 110s of 6.(*Z*)/JG 5 (redesignated 10./JG 5 on 16 March).


Snow-camouflaged Bf 109 Fs from JG 5 escorting well-weathered Ju 87s from I./St.G 5. Note the extent of the exhaust staining on the dive-bombers' fuselage sides. I./St.G 5 was formed from IV.(Stuka)/LG 1 in January 1942.

In the Far North – the area comprising northern Finland and the extreme north-western corner of the USSR – German fighter pilots met with a situation similar to that in the Crimea, for the enemy in the air was more formidable than in most other places in the East. This was despite the fact that the Hurricanes and Curtiss P-40s which constituted the main equipment of VVS fighter forces in the area were much inferior to the Bf 109 E, and the benefit to the Germans of being aided by reports from a *Freya* radar station, in itself a unique phenomenon on the Eastern Front.

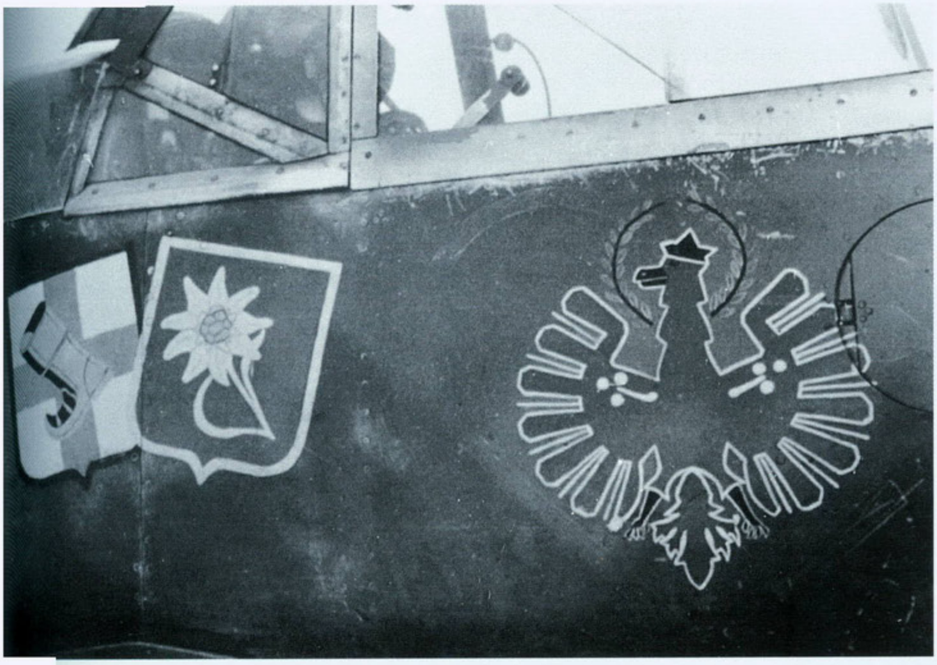
Air operations in the Far North were strictly limited by the long Polar Winter, during which the sun never rises above the horizon. Therefore, in the first two months of the year, only rarely was there any air fighting and in March 1942, *Fliegerführer Nord-Ost* logged 20 victories against the loss of 11 aircraft, five of them from JG 5. Only in April did activity increase, starting on the 4th when three of II./JG 5's Bf 109s intercepted a formation of VVS SF Hurricanes. In the ensuing engagement, Soviet fighters managed to injure two of the German pilots while the third German shot down a Hurricane. Five days later, six of II./JG 5's Bf 109s were bounced by Tomahawks and Hurricanes of 769 IAP with the result that two Bf 109s were shot down for no Soviet losses. Both German airmen, one of them being *Lt.* Alfred Jakobi with ten victories, were captured on the ground by Soviet troops.

Reinforced to a strength of over 30 Bf 109s by mid-April, II./JG 5 set about regaining the initiative. One morale-boosting event occurred on 23 April when a single pilot from 6./JG 5, *Uffz.* Rudolf Müller, destroyed four Hurricanes and an SB bomber during one and the same mission, all being verified in Soviet loss files. Five days later, 2 GSAP, which had lost two aircraft to *Uffz.* Müller on the 23rd, lost another five Hurricanes, including two to Müller.

January-October 1942

The size of *Fliegerführer Nord-Ost's* fighter force was doubled in May through the arrival of another *Jagdgruppe,* III./JG 5. This unit was led by *Hptm.* Günther Scholz, a veteran who had flown previously with 7./JG 54 where he had attained 26 kills. Now the German airmen were gradually able to improve their position and in May 1942, JG 5 recorded 149 victory claims against 11 pilots shot down.

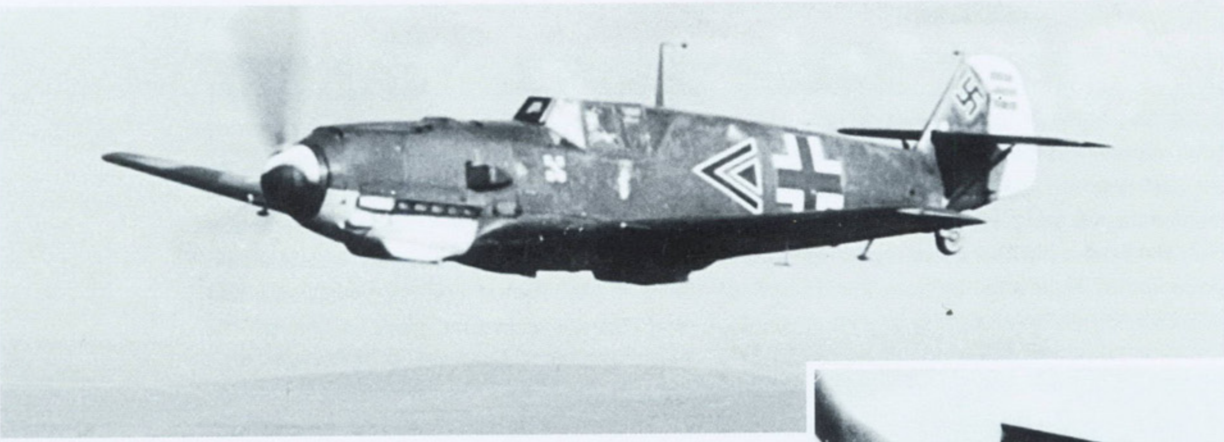
Not even the arrival of newer and better Kittyhawk and Airacobra fighters could break the new German dominance and JG 5 was now re-equipping with Bf 109 F-4s, a type superior to anything in VVS service. On 12 June II./JG 5 could report its 500th victory – not surprisingly scored by Rudolf Müller, now promoted to *Feldwebel.* By now, the *Gruppe* was being led by *Hptm.* Horst Carganico, who had attained 23 kills between late May and late June 1942 and thus surpassed the 50-victory mark.

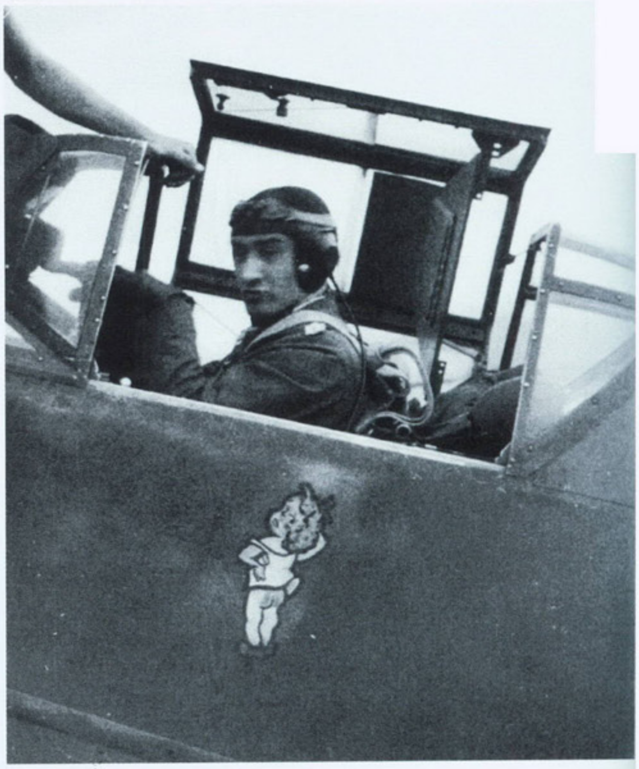


LEFT: Seen from left to right on this Bf 109 F are the badges of III./JG 5 – a Lapp boot superimposed on a white field and blue cross – combined with 8./JG 5's emblem of a yellow Edelweiss on a dark brown shield outlined in yellow. The spread-eagle emblem was in red, outlined in white, and is reported to have been in memory of Hptm. Alfred Pomaska who was killed over France in 1940. This marking was apparently applied to a number of 8./JG 5 aircraft, although the association with Hptm. Pomaska remains unexplained.

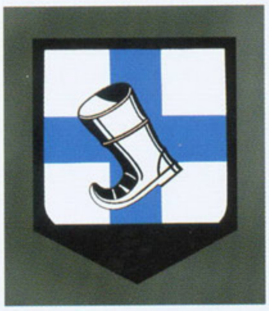
BELOW: A Bf 109, probably an E-7, showing the shamrock badge of 6./JG 5 on the cowling.

LEFT: Lt. Heinrich Ehrler became Staffelkapitän of 6./JG 5 in August 1942 and, with 41 victories, was awarded the Ritterkreuz on 21 October. On 17 May 1942, while escorting Ju 87s of I./St.G 5 in the Kandalaska area, Ehrler destroyed a Soviet Hurricane which, before it hit the ground, collided with the Bf 109 flown by Uffz. Helmut Schattschneider. Schattschneider crash-landed his crippled aircraft deep inside Soviet territory and succeeded in reaching the German lines, utterly exhausted, 15 days later. Such a feat was only possible in Summer and depended on the pilot landing in a remote area well away from any roads as these were frequently the centres of the fighting and increased the chances of being found by Soviet troops.

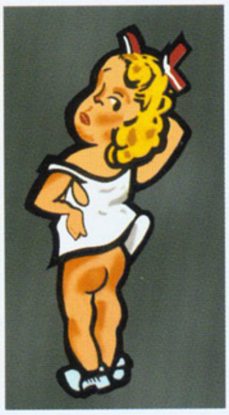




ABOVE AND RIGHT: Fliegerführer Nord-Ost was substantially reinforced in the Spring of 1942 when III./JG 5 transferred from the west coast of Norway and joined II./JG 5 in the Petsamo area. III./JG 5 was commanded by Hptm.Günther Scholz who, at that time, had 26 victories and had previously served with 7./JG 54 on the Eastern Front. The photograph (*ABOVE*) shows Hptm. Scholz's Bf 109 E-7 in the late Spring or early Summer of 1942 with 30 victory bars marked on the rudder.



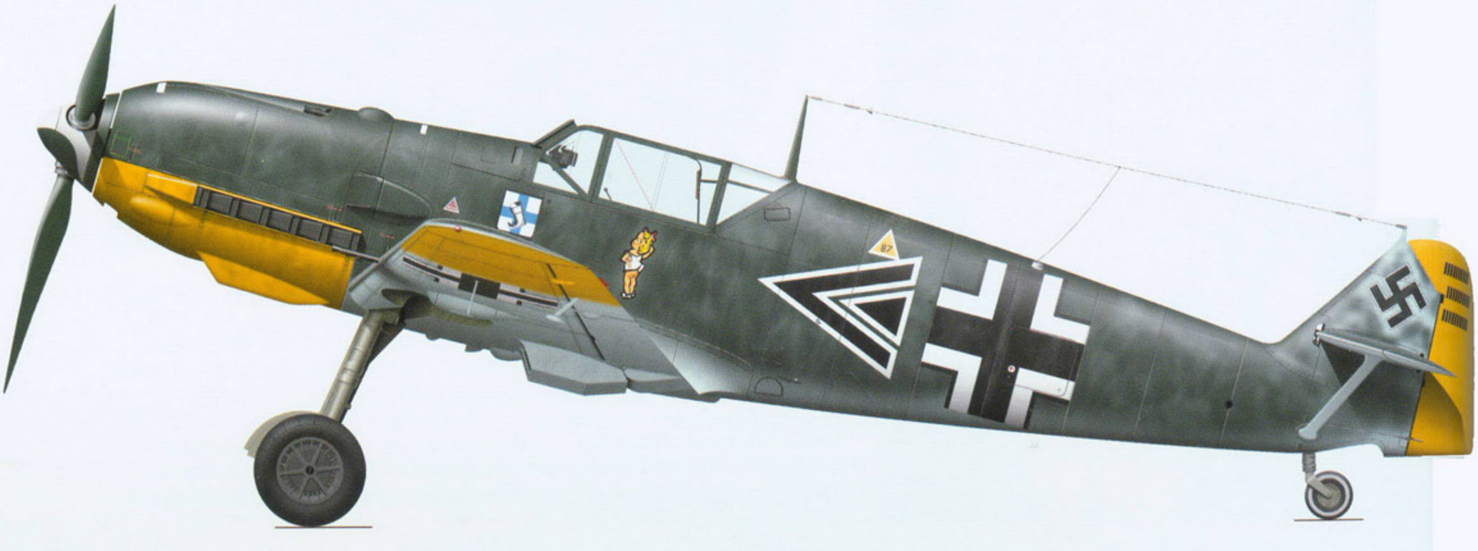
III./JG 5 emblem



Günther Scholz's personal emblem.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 E-7 flown by Hptm. Günther Scholz, Kommandeur of III./JG 5, Petsamo, Finland, 1942

Instead of the normal 74/75/02 mottle, the uppersurface camouflage on this aircraft is believed to have been oversprayed completely in a rather simple scheme of RLM 74, except for the top of the tail around the Hakenkreu The finish was uneven, giving the impression of two or more low-contrast colours and the machine also had yellow panels under the cowling and wingtips, with the yellow rudder marked with 30 victory bars. The Gruppe badge an Scholz's personal emblem were carried below the cockpit on the port side only.



Aces over Sevastopol

Although the *Wehrmacht* would never completely recover from the immense losses, particularly in heavy equipment such as artillery, that the Soviet Army had inflicted in the Winter of 1941/42, the Soviets had been even more weakened. Moreover, the successful defensive battles of May 1942 had resulted in the *Wehrmacht* being in a position to regain the initiative on the Eastern Front and, albeit at the expense of all other areas, Hitler was able to rebuild an offensive force on at least one sector of the front.

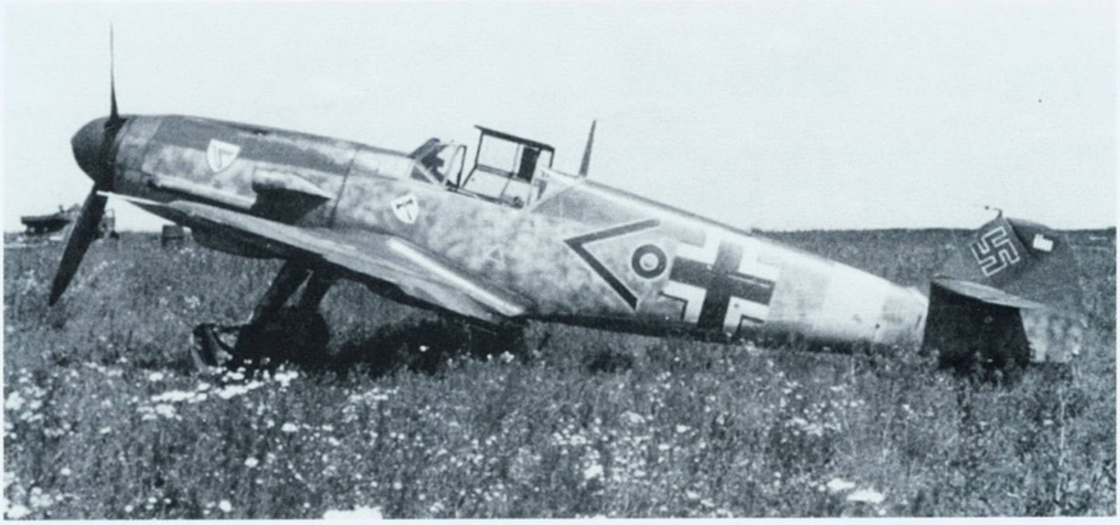
At the same time, German industry was beginning to overcome many production bottlenecks, and aircraft output figures increased from below 900 (including 232 fighters) in November 1941 to 1,400 (456 fighters) in March 1942. Nevertheless, by April 1942, although Germany controlled the bulk of Europe's workforce and industrial capacity, the USSR – even with most of its natural resources in German hands – started out-producing Germany. That month, 1,321 German and 1,515 Soviet combat aircraft left the assembly lines. Hence, it was logical that Hitler should direct all available means against the most critical point of Soviet industry, the concentration of oil fields in the Caucasus. For this purpose, more than 50 per cent of all serviceable combat aircraft available to the entire *Luftwaffe* for day operations (i.e. excluding night fighters) were concentrated under *Luftflotte* 4 which was supporting Army Group South on the Eastern Front.

ABOVE LEFT AND ABOVE RIGHT: An important development in 1942 was the expansion of the Luftwaffe's Schlachtflieger, or ground-attack force. However, proper control and direction was lacking for, although Luftwaffe aircraft had been used in the ground-attack role since the early days of the war, there was no separate organisation controlling them as in the case of other units. Even in January 1942, when Schlachtgeschwader 1 was formed from II./LG 2, it first came under the control of the General der Jagdflieger who was little interested in ground-attack and failed to ensure its proper development. In April, Sch.G 1 was ordered to Southern Russia and, after commencing operations with Luftflotte 4 in early May, flew a total of 1,467 sorties during the month, 1,028 of these being by Bf 109s. This Bf 109 E-7 of I./Sch.G 1 was coded 'White U' and carried the distinctive black triangle of the ground-attack arm on the rear fuselage.

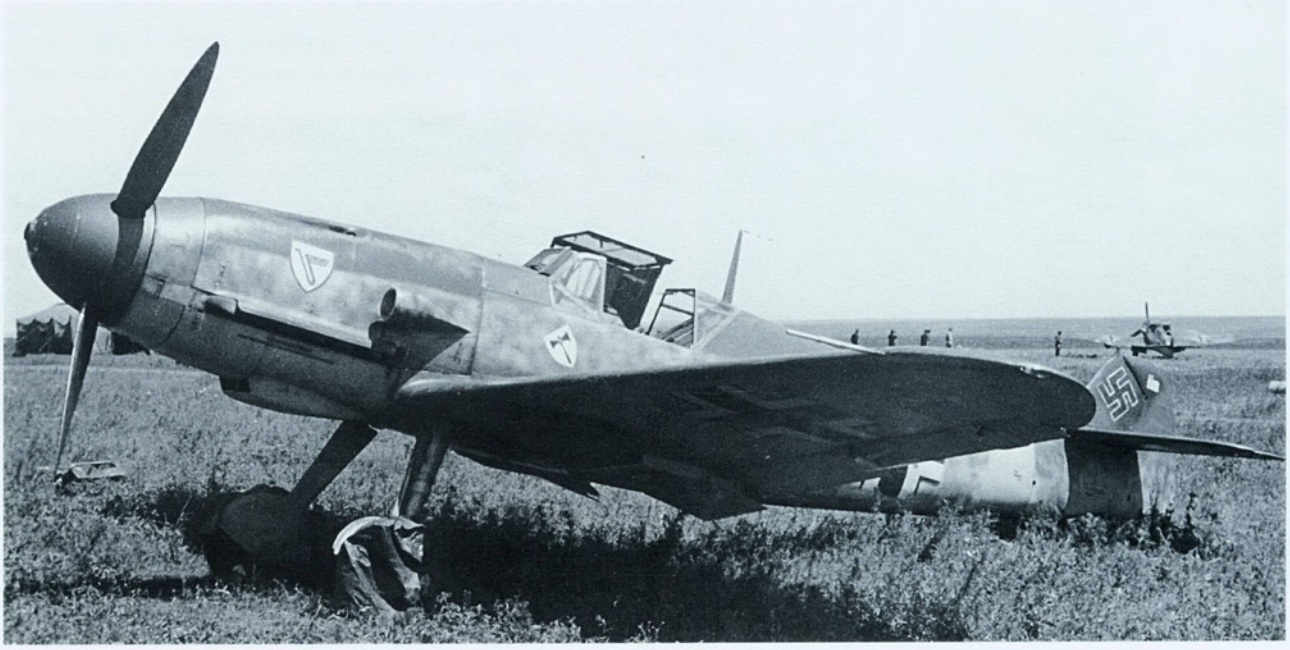
Before the new Summer offensive – Operation *'Blau'* – could begin, it was necessary to eliminate the threat posed by powerful Soviet forces still holding the port of Sevastopol in western Crimea. To complete the task of air support for this attack, *Generaloberst* Wolfram *Freiherr* von Richthofen's VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was reinforced with units brought in from the Mediterranean area and eventually mustered 600 aircraft, a tremendous force to be mounted against a single city. The fighter units which were directed against Sevastopol – III./JG 3, plus *Stab,* II. and III./JG 77 – were led by *Hptm.* Gordon Gollob. Although their opponent's air resources were limited to around 50 serviceable aircraft, German fighters met with formidable resistance whenever they encountered any enemy aircraft; indeed, some of the Soviet fighter pilots were the same aces who had put up such stiff resistance against III./JG 77 earlier that year.

The attack on Sevastopol opened with large-scale aerial bombardments on 2 June, and as early as the next day *Hptm.* Gollob found it necessary to instruct his fighter pilots to avoid turning combat with the Soviet fighter pilots who flew from Sevastopol. On 7 June, Gollob's fighters claimed nine victories but lost 11-victory ace *Lt.* Wolfgang Werhagen, and Gollob himself barely managed to reach friendly territory after a Soviet fighter damaged his radiator. Ultimately, the Soviet Sevastopol airmen were defeated because they were so hopelessly outnumbered, but they never ceased to impress their German opponents.

Conversely, the Soviet airmen also learned to respect their foe, and naval fighter ace *Kapitan* Mikhail Avdeyev later dedicated a chapter in his memoirs to one of the Bf 109 aces over Sevastopol, positively identified as II./JG 77's *Oblt.* Anton Hackl. When Sevastopol fell after a month's battle, the Germans counted a total of 123 Soviet aircraft shot down against 30 of their own destroyed or severely damaged.

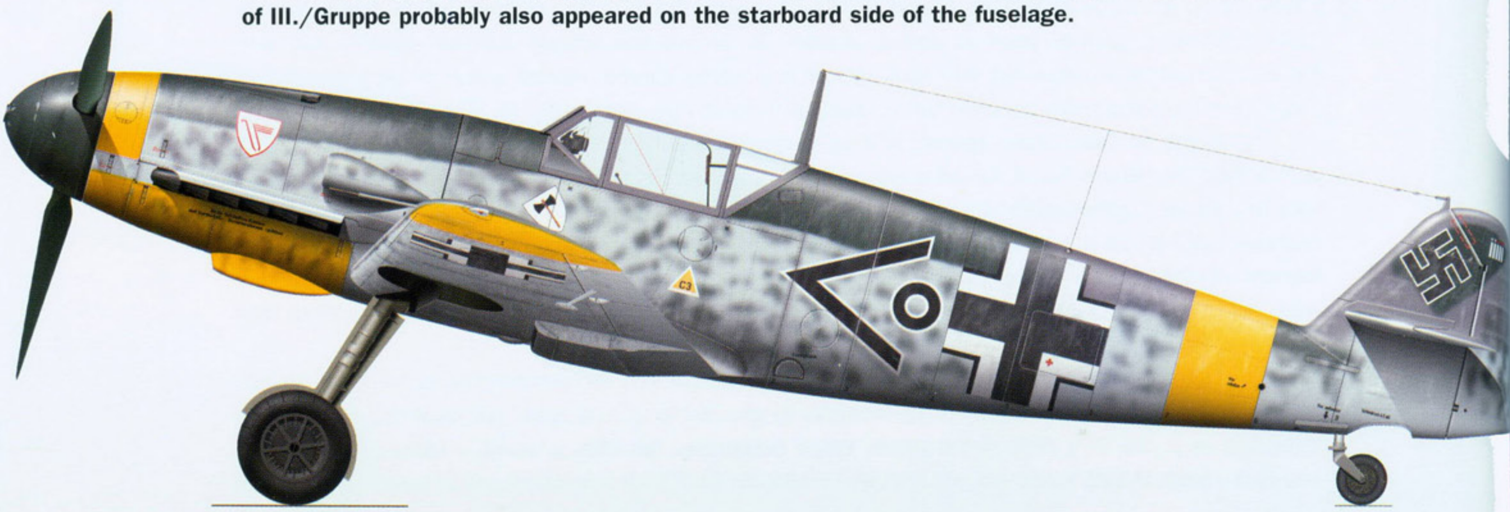


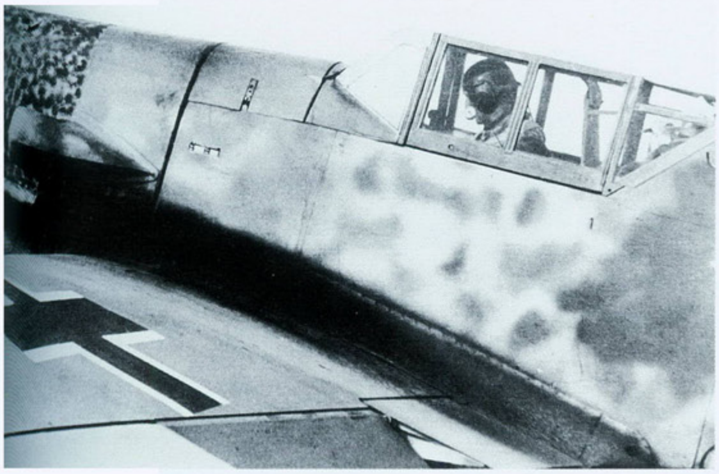
THIS PAGE: This Bf 109 F-2 was flown by Lt. Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel of III./JG 3, and was photographed in July 1942, at which time he was the Gruppe Technical Officer. On 25 August, this pilot was awarded the German Cross in Gold following a five-week period in which he accounted for 23 victories, bringing his total to 33. Five days later he was shot down and taken prisoner.



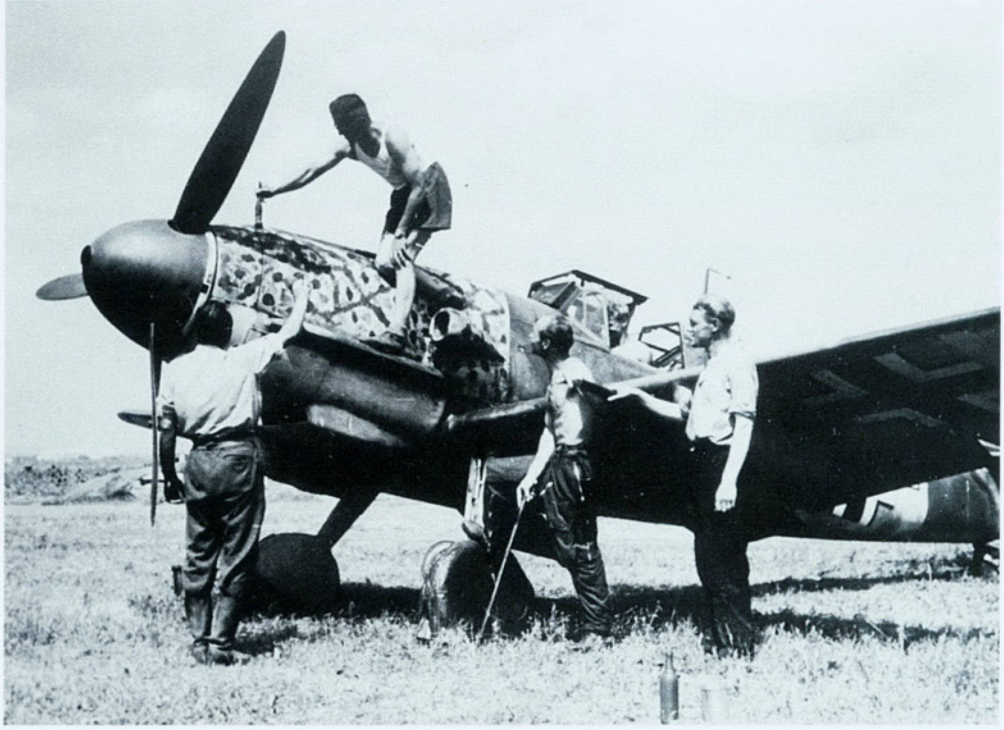
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-2 flown by Lt. Heinrich von Einsiedel, Technical Officer of III./JG 3, July 1942

This aircraft carried appropriate Stab markings together with five white victory bars painted on the rudder, the first two topped with RAF roundels, the remainder with red stars. Believed to have been camouflaged in the RLM colours 74/75/76, there was a hard demarcation line running along the top of the fuselage but the fuselage mottles were softly applied. The winged letter 'U' badge of JG 3 and the black battleaxe of III./Gruppe probably also appeared on the starboard side of the fuselage.

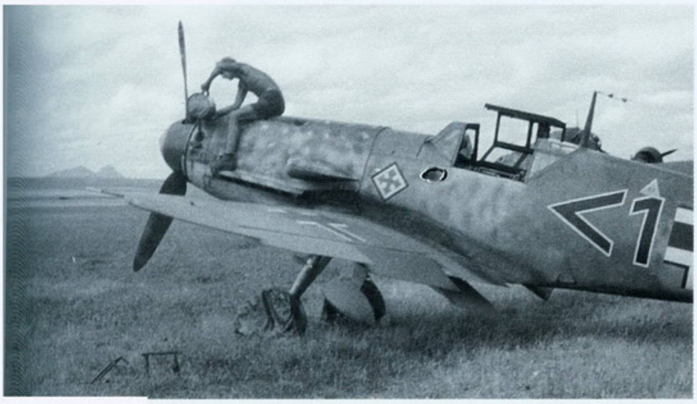


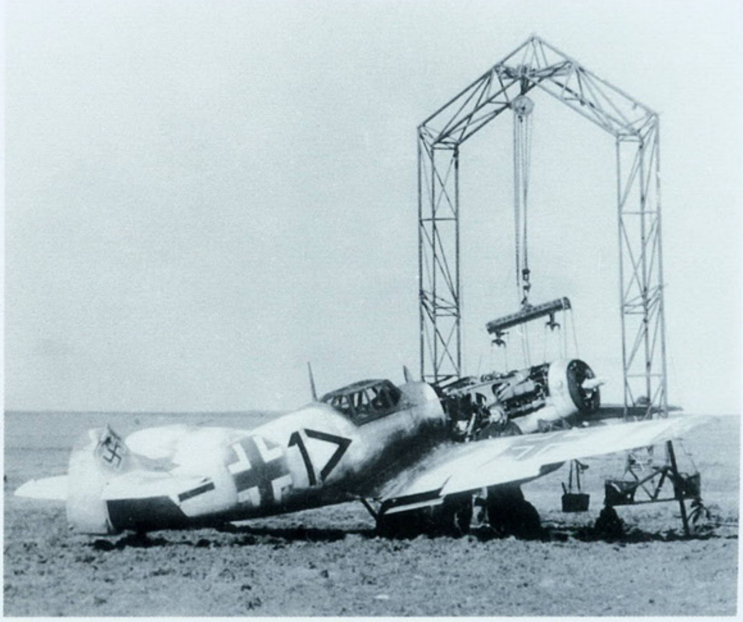


LEFT: This Bf 109 G-2 was flown by Hptm. Johannes Steinhoff, Kommandeur of II./JG 52, and has a dark area behind the cockpit where its identification markings have been changed. Note also the mottle applied to the cowling, possibly to conceal an earlier all-yellow finish.



RIGHT: Hptm. Helmut Bennemann of I./JG 52 supervising the repainting of his Bf 109 F. The cowling was originally all yellow but has been toned down by repainting the upper section light blue, over which a new camouflage pattern is being applied. The rest of the machine appears to be finished in a standard 02/74/75/76 scheme. Note that this aircraft carries a pair of underwing MG 151 machine-guns.

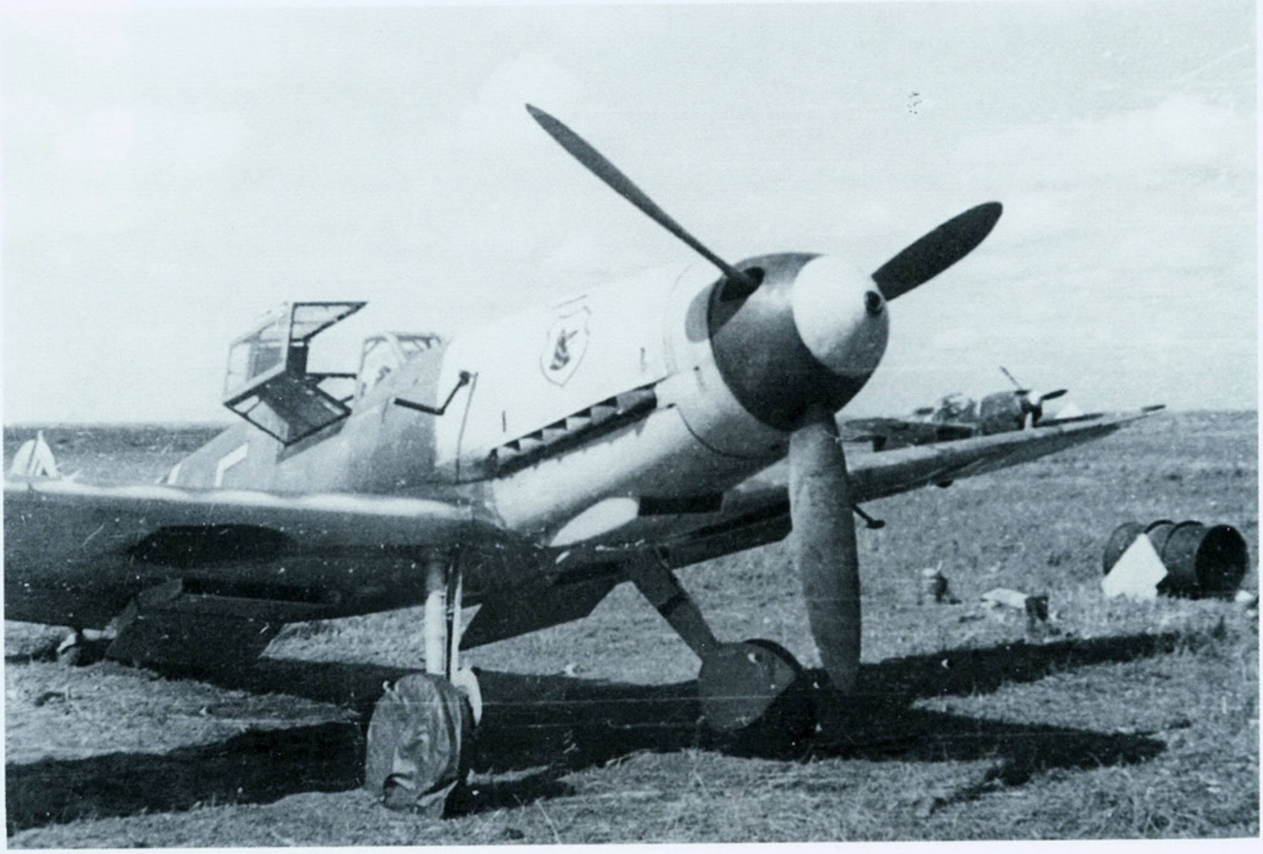




BOVE AND RIGHT: Two different aircraft from JG 52, both displaying the aracteristic staff marking and numeral combination much used by this schwader. The Gruppe bar on the rear fuselage of one of the aircraft under e gantry (*RIGHT*) identifies it as belonging to II./JG 52, whereas the badge on (*ABOVE*) is that of III. Gruppe. Note that the II. Gruppe aircraft still retain ir snow camouflage and that the fuselage of the III. Gruppe aircraft has been maged under the windscreen. Interestingly, the highest known example of the evron and numeral combination is <6.

ABOVE: A Bf 109 F-4 flown by Lt. Heinz Lüdemann of 8./JG 77 over the Crimea in the Summer of 1942.

RIGHT: Three Ritterkreuzträger of III./JG 3 in June 1942: from the right, Ofw. Eberhard von Boremski, Ofw. Georg Schentke and, seated, Oblt. Viktor Bauer. Later, when German troops in Stalingrad were surrounded, a detachment from JG 3, designated 'Platzschutzstaffel Pitomnik' or 'Airfield Defence Staffel Pitomnik', operated from Pitomnik airfield defending the transport aircraft which were flying in supplies. On 25 December 1942, Schentke - then an Oberleutnant with 90 victories - was shot down by anti-aircraft guns. He baled out but upon landing was immediately killed by Russian soldiers.



LEFT: Although believed to have bee photographed in the Summer of 1942. this Bf 109 F of JG 77 in Crimea still retains its all-yellow nose areas.

Forward Again

The first stage of Operation *'Blau'* opened on 28 June 1942 when three armies were launched eastward from the Kursk region with the aim of capturing the important communication centre of Voronezh. By that time, *Luftflotte* 4 had been brought up to a strength of about 1,700 German combat aircraft, of which approximately 1,200 were operational. A total of 211 operational Bf 109s was divided between JG 3 with *Stab* and all three *Gruppen*; JG 52 with *Stab* and all three *Gruppen* plus the 15. Croatian *Staffel*, I./JG 53 and JG 77 with *Stab* plus II. and III. *Gruppen* (I./JG 77 had been sent to the Mediterranean area to counter renewed RAF activity around Malta.)

These *Luftwaffe* forces enjoyed a numerical superiority of around 1:0.7 against VVS forces in the area, but the Soviets had drawn many important lessons from their setbacks in the past Winter and Spring, and their air force had undergone several qualitative improvements. Among other things, the structure of their front-line units had been modernised and organised into more independent air armies, three of which (2 VA, 8 VA and 4 VA) met the first onslaught of Operation *'Blau'*. These air armies could count on support from an increasing pool of reserves and, moreover, the Soviet fighter pilots began adopting the German tactic of teamwork in air combat. In addition, their technical equipment was also updated, most fighter units being equipped with modern, improved Yak-1s, Yak-7s and LaGG-3s. The new all-metal Pe-2 dive-bomber became more common in front-line service, and the heavily armoured Il-2 *Shturmovik* ground-attack aircraft appeared in larger numbers than ever. Perhaps the most decisive factor, however, was that a number of truly elite air units were assigned from the Stavka reserve to 2 VA and 8 VA.

The *Jagdwaffe*, however, was able to deal decisively with all of this, for due to the need to shorten pilot training schemes, the flight skills of the average novice airman posted to VVS units in mid-1942 was at the lowest level of the war. Moreover, the *Jagdgruppen* assigned to *Luftflotte* 4 included many of the most experienced fighter pilots of the war, most notably JG 52's *Obstlt.* Herbert Ihlefeld, JG 77's *Major* Gordon Gollob, and 9./JG 52's *Oblt.* Hermann Graf, each of whom had shot down over 100 enemy aircraft. Nevertheless, already during the weeks preceding Operation*'Blau'*, even these *Jagdwaffe* aces noticed a surprising increase in the quality of Soviet aerial activity. JG 52's *Geschwaderkommodore, Major* Wilhelm Otto Lessmann, was killed in combat on 2 June, as was Hermann Graf's new wingman in 9./JG 52, *StFw.* Alfred Emberger (credited with 25 kills), ten days later. On the 15th, 9./JG 52's *Ofw.* Leopold Steinbatz perished when his aircraft sustained a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire. With 99 kills to his credit, Steinbatz was the most successful fighter pilot lost to enemy action at that time. Posthumously, he became the first and only NCO to be awarded the Swords. On 21 June, after less than a week, JG 52's next *Geschwaderkommodore, Obstlt.* Friedrich Beckh, was shot down by four 2 VA MiG-3s and was killed near Valuyki. Beckh was credited with 48 aerial victories and had been awarded the Knight's Cross.

Even though the Germans had built up a local numerical superiority of at least two to one in the area east of Kursk, both sides suffered about equal losses in the air during the first days of Operation *'Blau'*. Among the German casualties on the last day of June was I./JG 53's *Lt.* Joachim Louis, who was shot down and captured shortly after scoring his 22nd victory, but these sacrifices were not in vain; the numerically weaker 2 VA proved unable to take such losses, particularly as theirs included a number of experienced unit leaders.

ABOVE:
Fw. Leopold Steinbatz of 9./JG 52 received the Oak Leaves on 2 June 1942 after 83 victories but was posted missing on the 15th. On 23 June he was posthumously awarded the Swords.

By the time the German ground troops began penetrating into Voronezh in the first week of July, a radical change in the character of air fighting took place. Suddenly, the skilful Soviet airmen of the first days seemed to have disappeared, to be replaced by apparently new pilots who, in some cases, seemed so inexperienced they hardly knew how to fly. These mainly came from the newly formed Soviet 1st Fighter Army (1 IA), prematurely rushed to the Voronezh sector with the task of challenging the air superiority of the Bf 109s. The first air battle between 1 IA and the German fighter pilots occurred on 5 July and resulted in a Soviet disaster, the *Jagdflieger* claiming 48 victories against only two losses. *Oblt.* Viktor Bauer, the *Staffelkapitän* of 9./JG 3, added four victories to his tally to reach a total of 74. *Hptm.* Georg Michalek, commanding I./JG 3, surpassed his 50-victory mark, also by destroying four, and in II./JG 77 – which had arrived straight from the Crimea the same day – the four kills claimed by

BELOW: Heinrich Setz was Staffelkapitän of 4./JG 77 from June 1941 to November 1942 and received the Ritterkreuz on 31 December 1941. In this later photograph of Setz, seen here as an Oberleutnant, he is shown wearing the Oak Leaves, awarded on 23 June 1942.

Oblt. Erwin Clausen brought his total to 62. Altogether, between 28 June and 9 July, *Luftflotte* 4 claimed to have shot down 540 Soviet aircraft in the Kursk – Voronezh area.

In the forefront of these battles was *Hptm.* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke who served in *Stab*/JG 3 where *Obstlt.* Günther Lützow was to familiarise him with the duties of a *Geschwaderkommodore.* Wilcke appears to have specialised in destroying lend-lease aircraft, claiming a Hurricane on 30 June, three Bostons on 3 July, and another Boston plus two LaGG-3s on 4 July. Of Wilcke's six claims on 5 July, three were Hurricanes and one a Boston, and after shooting down two Il-2s on the 9th, Wilcke again destroyed four Bostons on 10 July.

Thereafter, when the bulk of the German ground forces at Voronezh veered south with the aim of surrounding the Soviet South-Western and Southern Fronts between the rivers Donets and Don, II./JG 77 was left as the only *Jagdgruppe* at Voronezh but, under the leadership of acting *Gruppenkommandeur Hptm.* Heinrich Setz, it performed splendidly. During July alone, *Hptm.* Setz scored 50 victories, *Oblt.* Anton Hackl 37, *Lt.* Lutz-Wilhelm Burkhardt 24, and – before he was wounded in a flying accident on 26 July – *Fw.* Ernst-Wilhelm Reinert 26. This was quite sufficient to secure a convincing German air superiority in the region.

Meanwhile, the Soviets had to rob their reserves in order to be able to maintain their presence in the air. On 16 July, III./JG 3 tore apart a formation of Pe-2s which attempted to attack the air base at Millerovo, and the same evening, 9./JG 3's *Experten* team of *Oblt.* Viktor Bauer and *Ofw.* Eberhard von Boremski encountered a formation of Curtiss P-40s. Bauer claimed three, including his 90th victory, and von Boremski one, and on their way home the two Germans spotted a formation of Il-2s escorted by fighters. Bauer bagged one Il-2 and his wingman sent a MiG-3 burning to the ground.

However, neither the German means nor system of bringing forward supplies had been improved since the previous Summer. With too few lorries and transport aircraft available, and with inadequate roads and railways in the area, the supply organisation more or less disintegrated as soon as the troops moved forward. Frequently, it was only the level of personal contact between first-line units and supply store which proved to be the decisive factor in obtaining spare parts, ammunition or fuel. Therefore, while the numerical achievements of the *Jagdgruppen* were indeed astonishing, in view of the chaotic supply situation their own losses cannot be considered as particularly light. Just as during *'Barbarossa',* the same discouraging situation arose and the acute lack of spare parts rendered aircraft unserviceable after they had sustained only minor damage or technical faults. Only by cannibalising their own aircraft – normally strictly prohibited – and other such measures, collectively known as "organising", could operational levels be maintained. Inevitably, however, the level of serviceability dropped, as for example in JG 3 where a figure of 78 per cent on 20 June had reduced to 44 per cent one month later resulting in the actual number of serviceable Bf 109s in *Jagdgeschwader Udet* plummeting from 72 to 33.

It can be attributed only to the German fighter pilots' superior quality that the situation in the VVS was even worse. When German troops captured Rostov and started moving across the lower Don in late July, there were two VVS air armies, 4 VA and 5 VA, available to meet the German onslaught against the Caucasus in the air, but together, they could field no more than 220 serviceable aircraft by 28 July.

Ernst Wilhelm Reinert

ABOVE: Ernst-Wilhelm Reinert joined 4./JG 77 on the Eastern Front as Unteroffizier in June 1941 and regularly flew as Setz's wingman. He later became JG 77's most successful NCO pilot, and when awarded the Ritterkreuz on 1 July 1942, Uffz. Reinert had 53 victories. Later promoted to Feldwebel, he claimed his 100th victory on 3 October. This photograph shows Reinert after 6 October 1942, on which date he became only the second Feldwebel to received the Oak Leaves.

RIGHT: German forces first captured Rostov on 21 November 1941 but were forced to abandon it on the 29th and fall back. In a second attempt to take the city in July 1942, fierce street fighting developed as the Germans forced their way into the suburbs, and here, a German field gun has been brought up to break Soviet resistance. German forces captured Rostov on 27 July and, crossing the Don, advanced towards Stalingrad and south into the Caucasus.

Gordon M. Gollob

During the Second World War, only nine *Jagdwaffe* pilots were awarded the *Ritterkreuz mit Eichenlaub, Schwerten und Brillanten,* (1) one of Germany's most prestigious decorations: *Generalleutnant* Adolf Galland, *Oberst* Gordon M. Gollob, *Oberst* Hermann Graf, *Hauptmann* Erich Hartmann, *Oberst* Helmut Lent, *Hauptmann* Hans-Joachim Marseille, *Oberst* Werner Mölders, *Major* Walter Nowotny and *Major* Heinz-Wolfgang Schnaufer. Yet in spite of an exceptional career, *Oberst* Gordon M. Gollob was not as well publicised by German propaganda and today remains far less well-known than many of his contemporaries.

Gordon Gollob was born on 16 June 1912, a time when the Austro-Hungarian empire was still intact. Both his parents came from Graz, his mother, née Reininghau-Karajan, being related to the famous Karajan family of musicians. Travelling to various cities to paint and sell their work, they were staying in Vienna when their son was born and, to the surprise of many, the Gollobs gave him the names Gordon Mac in honour of a Scottish friend.

Gordon's father, Heinrich Gollob, did not live for long after the birth of his son and died in 1917. Gordon grew up in Graz and soon showed a talent for music, but although he could play the violin well, his dream was to fly and, in 1930, when he was still only 14 years of age, he started to build his own glider. He soon became an expert at sports gliding at Graz and, although he quickly progressed to become an instructor, Gordon wanted to improve his experience. As a result of the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye, Austria was then an independent state with a small army and, in 1933, Gollob enlisted and joined an artillery unit of the *österreichische Bundesheer*. Soon afterwards, he transferred to the flying branch of the Army and it was probably at that time that he abbreviated his middle name to the initial letter only and became simply Gordon M. Gollob. While the name 'Mac' was tolerated in the artistic circles of Vienna, it was perhaps less easily accepted by his army comrades.

Gordon M. Gollob began flying powered aircraft in 1934 and spent three years at the Wiener-Neustadt *Theresianische Militärakademie* where he soon gained an excellent reputation as an officer and pilot and where he was awarded his A-2 flying certificate. On 1 October 1936 he became the leader of the Austrian Fighter Training Unit where he was resposible for all fighter training. In the *Anschluss* of March 1938, Austria was annexed to Germany and became part of the Third Reich; the Austrian Air Force was taken over by the German Air Force and on 1 July 1938, Gordon Gollob became an *Oberleutnant* in the *Luftwaffe*. When his training as a fighter pilot ended, he was posted in March 1939 to 3./*Zerstörergeschwader* 76 equipped with the Bf 110 heavy fighter, or 'destroyer'.

Six months later, when his unit was based at Ohlau, Gollob took part in the invasion of Poland. Most of his missions were ground strafing operations, during which he destroyed several aircraft on the ground, but on 5 September 1939 he intercepted and shot down a Polish PZL-24 fighter as the first of his numerous aerial victories. With the conclusion of the campaign, I./ZG 76 was recalled to the *Reich* where its main task was to protect the German Bight. On 18 December, Gollob and his comrades took part to the famous 'Battle of the German Bight' during which a number of RAF Wellington bombers were destroyed. On that day, *Oblt*. Gollob took off from Jever leading a *Schwarm* from 3./ZG 76 reinforced with Bf 109 Es from 6./JG 77. This mixed formation claimed six victories, but only three were confirmed, one claimed by Gollob remaining unconfirmed.

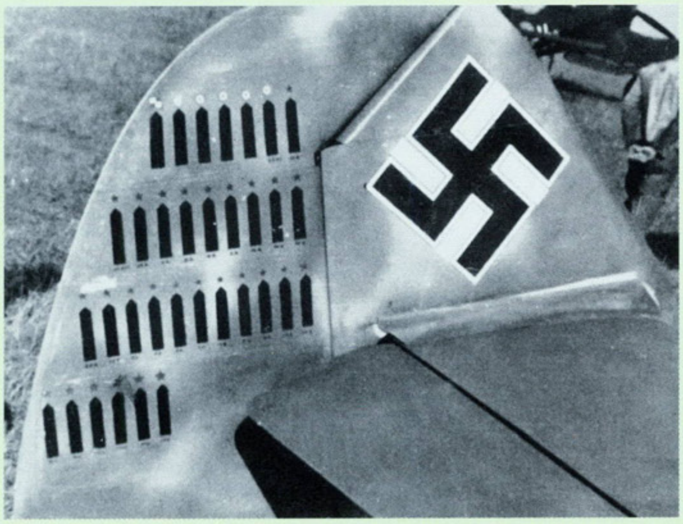
On 8 April 1940, after a quiet Winter, Gollob took over the 3./ZG 76, at that time based in Westerland. The next day 'Operation *Weserübung'* was launched and eight Bf 110s of 3./ZG 76 were ordered to attack the Norwegian airfield of Stavanger/Sola. However, due to poor weather, the *Staffel* was forced to break off its mission and two of the unit's Bf 110s failed to return. After the country was captured, I./ZG 76 transferred to Norway and was still there on 10 May when the pilots heard about the start of the *Westfeldzug*. On 13 June, aircraft from the Royal Navy's aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal carried out a gallant but futile bombing attack on the battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst*. Only one bomb hit the ship, causing little damage, but of the 14 Fleet Air Arm aircraft involved in the mission, eight failed to return. One of these, a Blackburn Skua, was shot down near Trondheim by *Oblt*. Gollob.

While on patrol off the Norwegian coast on 9 July, Gollob intercepted and shot down a four-engined Short Sunderland flying boat (2) and later took part in the disastrous raid on 15 August when *Luftflotte* 5 launched 134 aircraft from different airfields in Norway and Denmark to attack targets in north-east England. A total of 23 German aircraft was lost, including six Bf 110s from ZG 76. Nevertheless, Gollob was credited with shooting down a Spitfire but, with a seriously wounded gunner aboard, his aircraft was one of three which were badly damaged and Gollob barely succeeded in reaching the Norwegian coast.

At the beginning of September 1940, I./ZG 76 left Norway and transferred to Deelen where the unit was renamed II./NJG 1 and its personnel were to be retrained as night-fighters. Simultaneously, however, *Oblt*. Gollob requested a transfer and was soon posted to *Stab* II./JG 3, based in France.

On 12 October 1940, Gollob took command of 4./JG 3 and saw action during the last missions of the year against England. Previously, he had proposed several modifications to the Bf 110, and again his constant interest in technical improvements resulted in several suggestions regarding the Bf 109. For example, at that time, the *Luftwaffe* was flying missions to England at high altitude and several instances were reported of armament stoppages. *Oblt.* Gollob decided to help find a solution to this problem, and after climbing to approximately 10,000 metres in his Bf 109, flew for several minutes at this altitude before diving vertically back to his airfield in order that technicians waiting on the ground could examine the guns without delay. This trial revealed that the stoppages were due to the oil in the guns crystallising due to the cold at altitude.

Before leaving France, Gollob claimed his sixth victory, a Spitfire, on 7 May 1941, after which the unit moved eastwards to take part in *'Barbarossa'*. It immediately became clear that Gollob would be very successful in this new theatre of operations and on 22 June he destroyed an I-16 followed by two DB-3s on the 25th. But for *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots, conditions on the Eastern Front were far from easy and on 26 June, the *Kommandeur* of II./JG 3, *Hptm.* Lothar Keller, was killed. The next day, Gollob was appointed his successor and almost simultaneously promoted to *Hauptmann.* On 2 July, the new *Kommandeur* was credited with three *Luftsiege*. A series of further victories followed, many of them being multiple kills achieved on the same day or during the same mission and, by the end of the month, he had been awarded the *Ehrenpokal*. (3)



ABOVE:
The rudder of Hptm. Gordon Gollob's Bf 109 after his 33rd victory on 21 August 1941. At that time, Gollob was the Kommandeur of II./JG 3.

ABOVE:
Major Gollob surveying a battle-damaged Bf 109 F in Russi
August 1942.

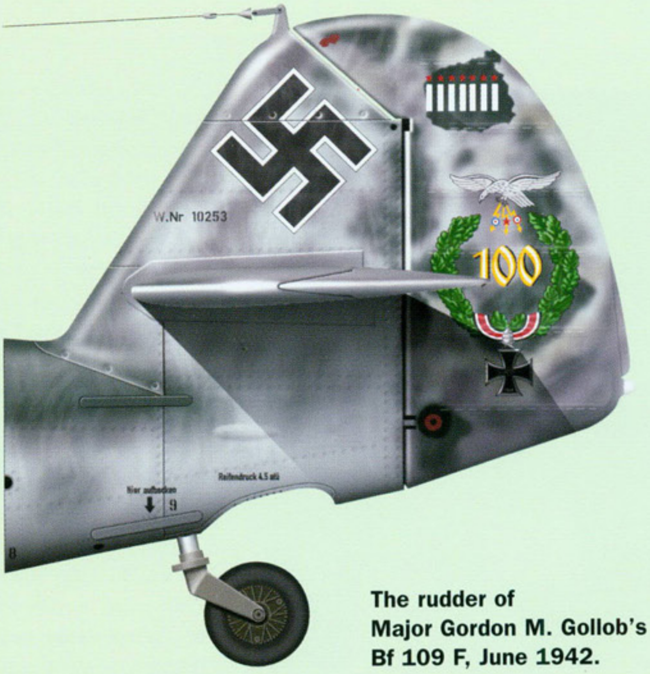
On 21 August 1941 Gollob claimed five victories and, ten days later, shot down a TB-3 heavy bomber as his 36th victory. On 18 September *Hptm.* Gollob claimed his 42nd victory and for this and in recognition of his remarkable abilities as *Kommandeur*, he was awarded the *Ritterkreuz*. Still his list of victories increased and, as further evidence of his abilities, he was credited with nine victories achieved within seven and a half hours on 18 October, bringing his total to 70. On 24 October, Gollob shot down a Polikarpov fighter as his 85th victory, but two days later his *Gruppe* was ordered back to Germany to rest and refit. While there, Gollob was called to Hitler's Headquarters where the *Führer* personally presented him with the *Eichenlaub*.

At almost the same time, however, Gollob learned that he had to hand over his *Gruppe* to *Hptm.* Karl-Heinz Krahl, formerly of JG 2, and take up a new position at the *Luftwaffe's* Test Centre at Rechlin. Although probably an unwelcome transfer, at Rechlin, Gollob's attention to technical matters was appreciated and he is known, for example, to have written a detailed study in which he compared all the known advantages and disadvantages between the Bf 109 F-4 and FW 190 A-2. In spite of the qualities he showed at Rechlin, he wished to return to the front and succeeded in being transferred to *Stab*/JG 54 where he was to learn the duties and responsibilities of a *Kommodore*. While with JG 54, Gollob claimed three more *Abschüsse* until, on 16 May 1942, he was appointed *Kommodore* of JG 77 as successor to the well-known Gotthard Handrick.

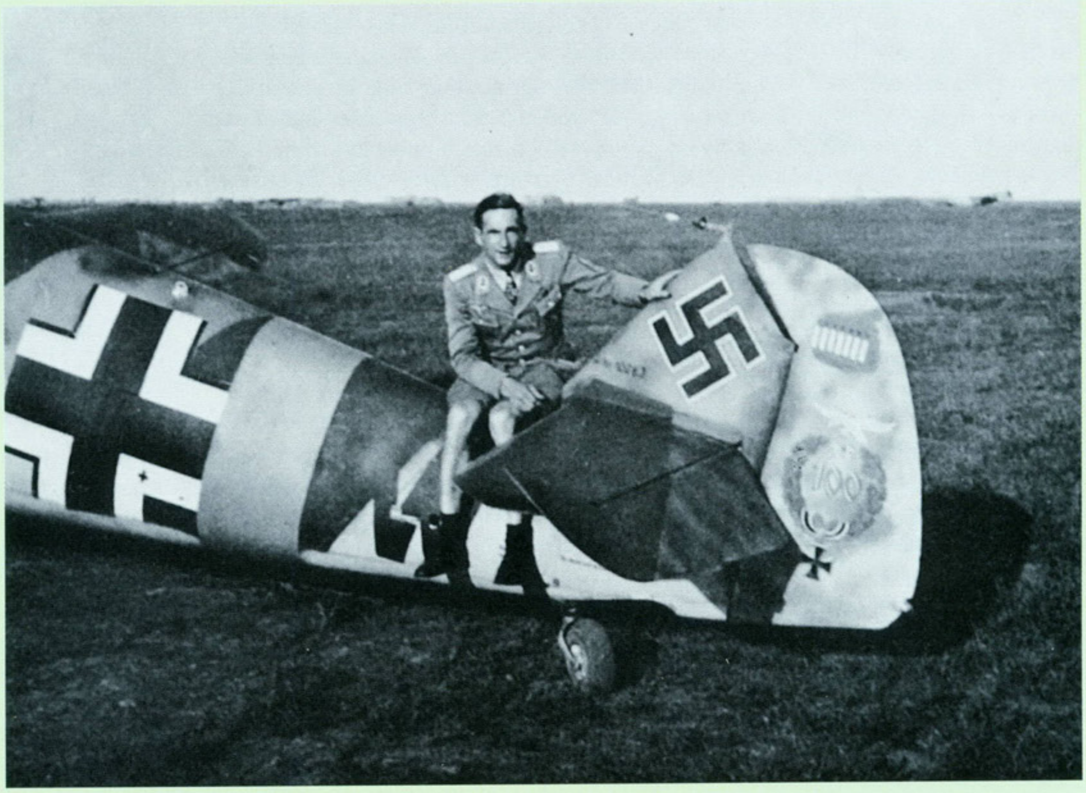
RIGHT:
Major Gordon Gollob wearing the Oak Leaves, awarded on 26 October 1941.

Over the Crimea, *Major* Gordon M. Gollob was heavily involved in the fighting over Sevastopol and quickly gained the respect of his pilots. On 16 May he claimed three LaGG-3s and the next day shot down three R-5s and a LaGG-3. On the 20th, Gollob shot down a DB-3 as his 100th victory and, on 23 June, received the *Schwerte* although he was not the only great ace of his unit; on the 19th, the *Kommandeur* of I. *Gruppe*, *Hptm.* Heinz Bär, had already reached 103 victories after shooting down four I-16s in a single combat.

BOVE: Major Gollob examining the
pers of a Russian PoW in the
mmer of 1942. Second from left in
is photograph, showing the Russian
ing interrogated, is Eichenlaubträger
Adolf Dickfeld of III./JG 52.



The rudder of Major Gordon M. Gollob's Bf 109 F, June 1942.



LEFT: Major Gollob and his Bf 109 F at Oktyabrskoye in the Crimea after his 107th victory on 21 June 1942. Interestingly, although someone found the time to paint the rudder design in some detail, the factory or delivery codes on the fuselage have still not been removed or overpainted.

At the end of June, JG 77 was dispersed when I./JG 77 was sent to Sicily to operate against Malta and, at the same time, II./JG 77 was sent to the Voronezh sector in Central Russia. Gollob therefore remained only in direct command of his III. *Gruppe* but events at the front were occurring quickly. On 22 July, *Major* Herbert Ihlefeld, *Kommodore* of JG 52, was seriously wounded while taking off from Taganrog in a Fi 156 and Gollob was therefore required to take temporary command of JG 52 while at the same time remaining *Kommodore* of JG 77.

In August 1942 *Major* Gollob claimed 40 more victories, further evidence - if any was needed - that he was not merely content with an administrative position but also wanted to continue playing his part in the fighting. Thus, on 29 August he claimed his 150th victory, becoming the first pilot to reach such a figure. This, however, was to be his last, for the next day, as the third member of the *Wehrmacht* after Mölders and Galland, he was awarded the *Brillanten* and, at the same time, was ordered to fly no more operational missions. On 30 September 1942, the Austrian officer was removed from the front, a departure which coincided with the removal of the rest of JG 77, this unit progressively transferring to the Mediterranean in order to replace JG 27.

ABOVE:
Major Gordon Gollob , Kommandeur of JG 77, photographed during the advance towards Stalingrad.

On 1 October 1942, Gordon M. Gollob was ordered to the *Stab* of *Jagdfliegerführer* 3 where he became Ia, or Intelligence Officer, responsible for co-ordinating the fighter units on the Channel. He remained in this position until May 1944 when he joined the Staff of the *General der Jagdflieger*. At that time, he became the father of a young son.

For Gollob, this was the beginning of a difficult period, due not only to the general situation of the war but, more particularly, to the fact that his relationship with Galland was not the best, perhaps due to Gollob's character which rarely allowed him to make concessions. Apparently, it was Gollob who was one of the first members of the Staff of the *General der Jagdflieger* to recognise the potential of the Me 262 and pushed for its maximum development, especially in its use solely as a fighter. He also played an important role in the development of the Me 163 *Kraftei*, the Me 263 and the He 162, being one of the few senior officers who had personally test-flown these advanced but highly dangerous aircraft.

The tensions between Gollob and his immediate superior, together with the deterioration of the general situation, eventually led to *Oberst* Gollob being posted back to Rechlin. His final influence on events at the front in 1944 were connected with his work as co-ordinator of the *Jagdgeschwader* engaged in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 and the famous Operation *'Bodenplatte'*, launched on 1 January 1945.

On 31 January 1945, following General Galland's fall from grace and dismissal, Gollob was appointed his successor as *General der Jagdflieger* Although his rank was never higher than *Oberst*, Gollob would have held this position until the end of the war had he not had to undergo surgery on his throat. Thus, at the time of the final surrender on 8 May 1945, Gollob was in a *Luftwaffe* military hospital in Kitzbühel, in his native Austria. Apart from replacing his uniform with civilian clothes, the former *Oberst* did nothing to avoid capture but lived quietly in Kitzbühel which, at that time was in the French zone. Eventually, however, in view of his important position, the Allies made serious efforts to trace him and he was eventually captured by the US Army and detained for over a year, during which time he was frequently interrogated by senior Allied officials who wanted information on the *Luftwaffe's* tactics, equipment and advanced aeronautical projects.

Eventually freed, Gollob had to begin a new life in a civilian occupation, a difficult challenge for a man who had known only a military career. However, thanks to his personal abilities, he secured a position in a factory as an engineer and settled down to family life, eventually with three children. In 1947, he wrote several works on aviation and his experiences in the *Luftwaffe*, and was always proud of the fact that not only was JG 77 the most successful unit with minimal losses, but that in all his missions, he "never lost a single wingman and they nearly all later became great aces themselves with high awards."

ABOVE:
Major Gollob wearing Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.

Gordon M. Gollob passed away on 7 September 1987 at the age of 75. In view of his achievements and prestigious career, it might be thought strange that this man has been neglected in the specialised post-war literature dealing with Second World War aviation but, as someone close to him explained to the author of this short biography, he was:

"... a professional soldier in the traditional sense and a highly disciplined and strict man. He was very intelligent, and was excellent in whatever he did, but his attempts at near perfection led him to avoid fame and anything, such as womanising, gambling or an excess of alcohol, etc, which might have brought him problems. His constant search for excellence led him into a detailed study of the use of air power as well as the purely technical aspects of aircraft."

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1. Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.
2. Serial number N6133, aircraft code 'Y', of 201 Squadron.
3. The *Ehrenpokal für besondere Leistung im Luftkrieg*, literally the Goblet of Honour for Distinguished Achievements in the Air War, was awarded to pilots and aircrew who had been awarded the EK I but whose actions did not merit the German Cross in Gold or the Knight's Cross.

LEFT: In the second phase of the German 1942 Summer offensive, Feldmarschall Fedor von Bock's Army Group B was ordered to clear the west bank of the Don and take the city of Voronezh. Here, German infantry move through a wheat-field in the River Don area.

Stopped in the Caucasus

When Hitler split his 1942 Summer offensive and ordered the new Army Group A to push south towards the Caucasus while Army Group B turned east towards the Don Bend and Stalingrad, *Luftflotte* 4 was also operationally divided. The air fleet was now under the command of *Generaloberst* von Richthofen, and he directed the bulk of his fighter forces to support Army Group B in the east, leaving Army Group A with *Stab*, III., and 15. (*Kroat*)/JG 52 as the only fighter units to support the important drive against the Caucasus oil fields. On 20 July, these units fielded a total of only 28 serviceable Bf 109s.

However, von Richthofen knew what he was doing. Not only were these units among the first in the East to be fully equipped with the new Bf 109 G-2, but among the pilots were to be found the two leading fighter aces of the entire *Luftwaffe* at that time; *Major* Gordon Gollob and *Oblt.* Hermann Graf. While Gollob maintained his position as *Kommodore* of JG 77, at the same time he also assumed command of JG 52 – its fourth *Geschwaderkommodore* in a period of less than two months – due to a take-off accident which injured JG 52's previous commander, *Major* Herbert Ihlefeld. Moreover, while the *Panzer* troops crossed the lower Don on their way into the Caucasus, I./JG 52 was training on Bf 109 G-2s in the rear and would soon arrive to support the *Geschwader's* III. *Gruppe.*

III./JG 52 was commanded by *Major* Hubertus von Bonin, and apart from its two 100-plus aces, *Oblt.* Hermann Graf and *Lt.* Adolf Dickfeld, it counted a large number of very experienced pilots each with around 40 or more victories, namely *Oblt.* Otto Decker, *Ofw.* Heinrich Füllgrabe, *Ofw.* Ernst Süss, *Ofw.* Josef Zwernemann, *Ofw.* Kurt Ratzlaff, *Fw.* Edmund Rossmann, *Fw.* Friedrich Wachowiak, and *Fw.* Hans Dammers. *Fw.* Alfred Grislawski, who previously had served as Graf's wingman, was on home leave after being awarded the Knight's Cross on 1 July 1942 after 42 victories. The dominance of NCO aces was a particular feature within III./JG 52, and this was especially noted by *Oberleutnant* Günther Rall. Rall had advanced to become the *Geschwader's* most successful pilot before being shot down and injured in November 1941 and, returning to his unit in late July 1942 to resume command of 8./JG 52, he was shocked to find that his 36 victories were overshadowed by the achievements of many ordinary sergeants.

Although Rall still suffered from a back injury and had to be lifted in and out of his aircraft, he was eager to catch up. On 2 August he claimed an I-153 and a 'MiG-1' (probably a Yak-1), but he had a long way to go. When *Oblt.* Hermann Graf shot down an Il-2 on 3 August, it was his 112th, and the next day *Major* Gollob claimed a Yak-1 as his 111th. During Army Group A's sweep south through the steppe in the northern Caucasus, German fighter activity in the area was marked by the competition between *Major* Gollob, *Oblt.* Graf and *Oblt.* Rall. When Gollob transferred Graf and one third of III./JG 52 to the Stalingrad region, as demanded by von Richthofen on 18 August, Gollob' score stood at 130, Graf's at 127, and Rall's at 55. However, Gollob did not select Graf to command the detachment as he nurtured a professional officer's scepticism towards the *Kriegsoffizier* Graf, and instead *Oblt.* Decker was assigned to lead the detachment.

During the period from the 14th to 29 August, *Major* Gollob claimed 33 victories and became the first pilot to reach 150, the last being a Pe-2 on 29 August. Meanwhile, III./JG 52 was credited with 32 victories (against three losses), and the pilots of 15.(*Kroat*)/JG 52 claimed nine kills.

On 30 August, Gollob became the third *Wehrmacht* soldier (after the two fighter pilots *Oberst* Werner Mölders and *Oberst* Adolf Galland) to receive the highest of Germany's military awards, the Diamonds to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves and Swords. Gollob was withdrawn from first-line service for the remainder of the war and posted to various staff positions, commencing with *Luftflotte* 1. His place as JG 52's *Geschwaderkommodore* was taken by *Major* Dietrich Hrabak, former commander of II./JG 54.

As Gollob left JG 52, the German offensive in the Caucasus was faltering in the face of increasing Soviet defence all along the front-line. I./JG 52 had only stayed a short while in the Caucasus operational area, and was already operating on the Central Front. Simultaneously with the departure of *Oblt.* Decker's III./JG 52 detachment, the bulk of the *Luftwaffe's* bomber forces had also left the Caucasus to be deployed against Stalingrad. The fact that immediately afterwards Army Group A was halted short of its objectives, the Grozny and Baku oil fields, is testimony to the German Army's dependence on air support.

"It was all a gamble..."

Alfred Grislawski, JG 52

There was no better officer than *Major* Hubertus von Bonin. He was a fantastic pilot and a great commander, but he was a poor shot and although he therefore had great difficulty in bringing down enemy aircraft, I have nothing but praise for him. I had already won the *Ritterkreuz*, awarded on 1 July 1942, when von Bonin was recommended for his. I lent him my decoration and he wore it until his RK arrived at the end of 1942. He promoted me to *Oberfeldwebel* after I had shot down four Douglas Boston bombers.

On that occasion there were six bombers, escorted by about 20 to 25 fighters, which were attempting to bomb the bridge at Mostok. My wingman, Edmund Rossmann, said he would keep the fighters busy while I went after the bombers. I dived after them, always keeping an eye open for Russian fighters behind me, but all was clear. I opened fire from a range of about 100 metres, aiming at the left engine of each of the four bombers. Each engine immediately burst into flames and the Russian crews baled out. When I reported the kills to von Bonin, he stated that I would receive a promotion if the kills could be confirmed. That evening the *Flak* commander at the bridge, who was a close friend of von Bonin, confirmed over the telephone that four bombers had indeed been shot down. Unfortunatley, *Major* von Bonin was later killed in Russia.

During the battle of Stalingrad, Hermann Graf took half of the squadron there while I stayed on the Caucasus front. With about 20 aircraft we defended the area of Grosny on the Black Sea. We seldom had contact with other units as it was too dangerous to place too many aircraft on one airfield. JG 52 had the most kills because we were always assigned as a 'fire brigade' to all the 'hot spots' on the front—the Uman cauldron, Kharkov, Tuapse, Feodosia, the Crimea; in fact, wherever the Russians appeared in strength. Thus, we had plenty of opportunities to destroy Russian aircraft and became obsessed, shooting them down and becoming very aggressive without fear of losses. Our first *Ritterkreuz* winner was Gerhard Köppen who was only an *Obergefreiter* but, when he demanded the respect that such a decoration deserved, was rapidly promoted to *Leutnant*. Upon returning from a mission in May 1942, he reported seeing a Russian fighter airfield and we held a briefing to attack it. The mission was carried out by between 30 and 40 aircraft, and the only one missing when we returned was flown by Köppen who made a belly landing in the Sea of Azov. The last flight searching for him saw a Russian rescue craft 5 km away which was strafed and sunk, but other than that there was only a patch of oil on the water and no sign of Köppen.

Within 9./JG 52, we pilots formed close friendships. This was necessary, for when one pilot was threatened by attack from three or four of the enemy, his comrades would immediately come to his assistance. Our slogan was to be aggressive.

On the ground, to avoid a direct bomb hit killing most of the unit, we did not concentrate all the pilots in one area but spread out and lived in two-man tents. I shared a tent with Leopold Steinbatz, who was an excellent shot but often returned from a mission without his wingman. He received the Swords as a *Feldwebel* and was commissioned as an officer after his death in June 1942 in a ridiculous situation. The Russians had advanced and were protected by quadruple *Flak* guns. When we flew over their forward lines at a height of several hundred metres they opened fire and it was very dangerous. Therefore, most of us took evasive action to avoid their fire, and although Steinbatz said they would never hit him, they did shoot him down. Rossmann flew to the area to look for him. The German infantry reported that a '109 had gone down at a particular time and place and thus confirmed his demise.

In the air I felt like a bird, a crow. The aircraft was powerful and I always felt safe in the cockpit, just like crossing the street. I never crashed an aircraft unless it had sustained severe damage due to gunfire. If I received hits around the landing gear, I had to consider whether to extend the gear and risk overturning or whether to land on the belly and damage the propeller and oil cooler. However, it was all a gamble and although I twice landed an aircraft on its belly, it turned out that the landing gear was in working order, though I could not have known this at the time. It was a game of roulette.

JG 51 'Mölders' in Trouble

As the fierce Winter battles on the Central Front died down and Spring arrived, German and Soviet forces had each fought to the point of exhaustion. Both sides then sought to rebuild their strength, and the period April to June 1942 was calm with comparatively little fighting in the air. It was, therefore, bad luck rather than enemy activity which deprived JG 51 of three of its greatest aces in less than ten days. *Lt.* Hans Strelow, with 68 victories, was lost when he was shot down over Soviet territory on 22 May; 2./JG 51's *Oblt.* Erwin Fleig, once wingman to the legendary Werner Mölders, baled out over Soviet territory on 29 May and was captured immediately after achieving his 66th victory; and two days later, *Hptm.* Josef Fözö, the 27-victory veteran *Kommandeur* of I./JG 51, was severely injured in a landing accident and would never return to first-line service.

In the Spring of 1942, the *Luftwaffe* units on the Central Front were, following the departure of VIII. *Fliegerkorps* staff, organized into *Luftwaffenkommando Ost*, commanded by *General der Flieger* Robert *Ritter* von Greim. While several German air units that previously had operated on the Central Front now served under *Luftflotte* 4 – including I. and II./JG 52 – the Germans attempted to delude the Soviets into believing that their Summer offensive would be launched by Army Group Centre, and not by Army Group South. This succeeded, with the result that *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* had to face increasing Soviet numerical superiority.

By 20 June, *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* reported a total strength of 155 serviceable combat aircraft, including 73 Bf 109 fighters. The latter were grouped into *Stab,* II., III. and IV./JG 51 *'Mölders'* (I./JG 51 served under *Luftflotte* 1 in the Demyansk area), plus 15.(*Span*)/JG 51.

A feature of JG 51 *'Mölders'* at this time was that it was the only *Jagdgeschwader* in the East to retain the old Bf 109 F-2 as its standard aircraft. Also, JG 51 did not have the same concentration of top aces as other *Jagdgeschwader* in the East. This is due mainly to the fact that its best pilots of 1941 – Mölders, Joppien, Bär and Hoffmann – had either been killed or, in Bär's case, been posted elsewhere while, as already mentioned, in May 1942 three other great JG 51 aces – Strelow, Fleig and Fözö – had been lost. Certainly, Soviet airmen transferred from another sector noted that the weakest German fighter opposition was provided on the Central Front, i.e. by the pilots of JG 51.

The appearance of the Spanish volunteer fighter unit 15.(*Span*)/JG 51, as mentioned above, perhaps requires a word or two of explanation. During Operation *Barbarossa,* the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco had supplied the *Luftwaffe* with a Bf 109-equipped fighter squadron, 1a *Escuadrilla de Caza,* which was incorporated into VIII. *Fliegerkorps* as 15.(*Span.*)/JG 27. After a poor performance – ten victory claims against five pilots killed and one injured – this unit was pulled back to Spain in January 1942. In the Summer of 1942, Franco decided to despatch a second *Escuadrilla* to support Hitler's crusade against "The Red Menace" in the East. This time, however, one of the most able Spanish fighter pilots was picked to lead the unit; *Comandante* Julio Salvador Diaz-Benjumea, an ace with 24 kills in the Spanish Civil War. 2a *Escuadrilla,* or *Escuadrilla Azul* (Blue Squadron) as it was called, duly arrived at Orel where, in order to reinforce *Luftwaffenkommando Ost's* fighter force, it was decided to deploy the *Staffel* under JG 51's command as 15.(*Span.*)/JG 51. The first victories of the *Escuadrilla Azul* occurred on 1 July 1942, when *Capitan Provicional* Juan Frutos Rubio and *Teniente* Ramon Escude Gisbert each accounted for a LaGG-3.

A few days after Rubio's and Gisbert's initial success, the war on the Central Front flared up again as each side launched powerful offensives against the other. The ADD – the reorganised Soviet strategic bomber force – made a number of successful night attacks against German rail junctions. These could be carried out without encountering any opposition other than *Flak,* for one of the *Luftwaffe's* weaknesses on the Eastern Front was the lack of a night-fighter force. In the Leningrad sector, this could be overcome temporarily by taking advantage of the bright mid-Summer nights in the north. Carrying out *freie Jagd* missions over the area where Soviet transport aircraft regularly flew supplies to surrounded Soviet troops near Lyuban, a handful of JG 54's pilots developed into 'night fighter aces', the most famous among them being III./JG 54's *Lt.* Erwin Leykauf, who once knocked down six Soviet transport aircraft during a single mission, while II./JG 54's *Hptm.* Joachim Wandel achieved a total of 16 night victories that Summer, half of which were achieved on the nights of 6/7 and 7/8 July. But on the Central and Southern Fronts, where there were no night fighters available whatsoever, the ADD was carrying out its attacks with increasing success. In June 1942, it managed to put a large part of JG 51's aircraft out of commission on the airfields at Orel, Bryansk and Dugino.

Nevertheless, when the Soviets despatched their bombers and ground-attack aircraft *en masse* in daylight against the same targets on 5 July, it proved to be a huge mistake. II./JG 51 was scrambled from Bryansk, and as the Bf 109s hurled themselves against the large Soviet formations, the scenes from the previous Summer were repeated. By the end of the day, the *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Hartmann Grasser, calculated that 46 Soviet aircraft had been shot down against only two Bf 109 F-2s which received severe battle damage. *Fw.* Anton Hafner was credited with seven kills, bringing his total past 40; *Oblt.* Karl-Heinz Schnell also bagged seven, repeating the day in June 1941 when he had destroyed four bombers in four minutes; *Oblt.* Karl Rammelt shot down five (three Il-2s and two Pe-2s), and *Hptm.* Grasser himself accounted for eight victories. The Spanish pilots of *Escuadrilla Azul* contributed with another four victories – two Pe-2s, one Il-4, and one LaGG-3. On 17 July, the commander of Soviet 1 VA who had ordered the operation, *General-Leytenant* Timofey Kutsevalov, was replaced by *General-Mayor* Sergey Khudyakov. Subsequently, and whether due to Khudyakov or not, it is a fact that the Soviet units opposed to *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* were substantially strengthened during the latter half of July. At the same time, the Kalinin and Western Fronts started to prepare a powerful offensive against German 9th Army in the so-called Rzhev Bulge, with the intention of diverting *Wehrmacht* forces from the Southern Front. *General-Mayor* Aleksandr Novikov, the new C-in-C of VVS KA, personally supervised the task of reinforcing 1 VA and 3 VA, which were to support the offensive.

ABOVE: Probably the best ground-attack aircraft of the Second World War, the Soviet Il-2 proved difficult to destroy in the air on account of the armour-plate which protected the engine and cockpit. German fighter pilots experimented with various techniques, some preferring to attack from below and behind while others found that an attack from above and behind sometimes set the fuselage fuel tank behind the cockpit on fire. Nevertheless, in most cases the machine seemed unaffected by attacks and could absorb a considerable amount of damage. Indeed some Luftwaffe pilots reported firing all their ammunition at a single Il-2 which – unlike this crash-landed example – still managed to survive.

When the Soviet offensive began on 30 July, heavy rain grounded the German aircraft and large-scale air battles did not develop until the next day. Massive formations of Il-2 *Shturmoviks*, appearing in larger numbers than ever before, helped the Soviet Army to split the front between German 87th and 256th Infantry divisions. *Major* Karl-Gottfried Nordmann, *Geschwaderkommodore* of JG 51, instructed his pilots to concentrate on the Il-2s and this was not without success, for on 1 August, 20 of the 26 aircraft JG 51 claimed to have shot down were Il-2s. More than one-third of this achievement was made by *Ofw.* Franz-Josef Beerenbrock of *Stab* IV./JG 51, who shot down no fewer than nine aircraft in three separate engagements. Beerenbrock's performance was of great significance, for these victories pushed his total tally to 102, for which he was awarded the Oak Leaves. In accordance with usual practice, Beerenbrock was then sent home on leave, and JG 51 therefore lost an outstanding fighter pilot at a very serious time.

The air battle reached a climax on 2 August, when *Stab*, II., III. and IV./JG 51 recorded 45 victories, again mainly against Il-2s, but when confronted with the fighters of 1 VA and 3 VA, events took a different turn and during the first three days of August no fewer than 20 pilots of JG 51 were shot down. On 2 August, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of III./JG 51, *Hptm.* Richard Leppla, was shot down and was seriously injured, almost losing the sight of one eye, as a result of which Leppla, *Ritterkreuzträger* and victor in 68 aerial combats, spent most of the remainder of the war in staff positions and schools. The next day, 11./JG 51's *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Georg Seelmann was shot down by a Soviet fighter near Rzhev at 15.25 hrs. Seelmann, another *Ritterkreuzträger* credited with 39 victories, baled out with injuries. Two other *Staffelkapitäne* in JG 51 were injured during the air fighting on August 3; *Oblt.* Harald Jung of 4./JG 51, and *Lt.* Gottfried Schlitzer of 9./JG 51. The latter, an ace with 25 victories to his credit, died from his wounds three days later. The 16 victories claimed by JG 51 on 3 August was a poor consolation. As JG 51 was losing aircraft and, particularly, one experienced veteran pilot after another, it became clear that the Soviet fighter pilots were gaining the upper hand. It therefore meant much to *Jagdgeschwader Mölders* when *Major* Joachim Müncheberg arrived to be groomed under *Major* Nordmann's supervision for the role of *Geschwaderkommodore*. Müncheberg had served with JG 26 *'Schlageter'* for four years. In 1941, his 7./JG 26 had earned fame for its feats against the RAF in the Mediterranean

BELOW: Ofw. Franz-Josef Beerenbrock and the rudder of his aircraft marked with the 102 victories which earned him the Oak Leaves, awarded on 3 August 1942. Only a few months later, on 9 November, Beerenbrock shot down three Soviet aircraft, bringing his total victories to 117, but damage to his aircraft's cooling system obliged him to make a forced landing behind enemy lines and he was taken prisoner.

area when it shot down 52 British fighters, 25 by Müncheberg, without losing a single pilot. Two of the 16 victories filed by JG 51 on 3 August 1942 became *Major* Müncheberg's 84th and 85th kills. Müncheberg arrived with the same preconception of the air war in the East as held by most German fighter pilots on other fronts, namely that it was something of an "easy game." After Soviet fighters twice shot him down within four weeks, he modified his opinion.

Major Hannes Trautloft, commanding JG 54 in *Luftflotte* 1, received an urgent call to transfer parts of his *Jagdgeschwader* to *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* in order to assist JG 51. This indicates the situation was indeed desperate, for by that time *Luftflotte* 1 and Army Group North were assembling forces for Hitler's intended 'final blow' against Leningrad. At the same time, the German 11th Army was moving northwards from Sevastopol to the Leningrad area, and now *Luftflotte* 1 had to divert large parts of its forces to save the situation to the south.

Accordingly, on 6 August, *Stab* and II./JG 54 together with I./JG 51 arrived at Dugino aerodrome, 40 miles south of Rzhev, where almost the entire JG 51 was concentrated. *Major* Nordmann received *Major* Hannes Trautloft with the words, "All hell is loose in the air!" The previous day, *Lt.* Herbert Puschmann had achieved II./JG 51's 1,000th aerial victory by downing two Pe-2s, a MiG-3, and an Il-2, but on 6 August, JG 51 lost another of its most formidable pilots in 19-victory ace *Lt.* Benno Gantz.

BELOW: A Bf 109 F-2 of 2./JG 51 escorting a Ju 87 D in the Summer of 1942.

JG 54 was also suffering severe setbacks of its own. On 9 August, *Oblt.* Max-Hellmuth Ostermann, now appointed *Staffelkapitän* of 8./JG 54, perished when he was shot down by a LaGG-3 east of Lake Ilmen. Ostermann had just returned to the front after a long home leave following his 100th victory and subsequent award of the Swords in May. He had striven to become the first fighter pilot to reach the 150-victory mark (this was before JG 52's *Major* Gollob had achieved that feat), but the constant rivalry between the top aces in the *Luftwaffe* eventually compelled some among them to push themselves too far or to become careless, often with fatal results. Upon receiving the news of Ostermann's death, *Major* Trautloft wrote in his diary: "We often, and sometimes somewhat carelessly, speak about an 'irreplaceable loss,' where perhaps some less strong expression could be used, but in this case 'irreplaceable' felt inadequate." With 102 victories to his credit, Ostermann was the *Luftwaffe's* first ace with more than 100 victories to be killed in action.

On this 9 August, II./JG 54 claimed 21 Soviet aircraft shot down including four Yak-1s destroyed by 6. *Staffel's Lt.* Hans Beisswenger in a single combat. The next day, however, Beisswenger's *Staffelkapitän, Hptm.* Karl Sattig – credited with 53 victories – went missing during an engagement. The following night, a devastatingly successful Soviet bombing attack on Dugino aerodrome put 25 German aircraft out of commission, including 16 Bf 109s from JG 51 and II./JG 54.

BELOW: Soviet troops in action somewhere on the 2,000 mile Eastern Front.

With both sides launching huge forces in futile attempts to achieve a major breakthrough, the situation along the Central Front had many similarities with the trench warfare on the Western Front during the First World War. Meanwhile, overhead, large-scale dogfights took place and on 13 August, when JG 51 recorded 18 victory claims, the top ace in 12./JG 51, *Oblt.* Ernst Weismann, with 69 victories, was lost in combat with Soviet fighters. On 14 August, *Jagdgeschwader Mölders* lost another ace when *Fw.* Richard Quante, credited with 49 victories, was shot down and killed by a Soviet fighter.

The units of *Luftwaffenkommando Ost*, as well as those of the Soviet 1 VA and 3 VA, rapidly became worn down. In JG 51, 73 Bf 109s were destroyed or severely damaged due to various causes between 30 July and 13 August. On the Soviet side, 201 IAD lost 17 Yak-1s and four MiG-3s in combat operations during the same period, with another nine fighters receiving severe battle damage.

On 15 August, a sixth *Jagdgruppe*, I./JG 52, equipped with the new Bf 109 G-2, arrived to strengthen *Luftwaffe* forces on the Central Front. On 23rd, this *Gruppe* lost its top scorer, *Ofw.* Heinz-Wilhelm Ahnert, shortly after he had downed his 57th enemy aircraft. On the other hand, between the 15th and 23 August, I./JG 52 was credited with 43 victories. Also on the 23rd, I./JG 54 – also equipped with Bf 109 G-2s – arrived to further bolster *Luftwaffenkommando Ost,* which was thereby provided with the strongest *Luftwaffe* fighter force in any single sector. Mustering 226 Bf 109s, of which 174 were serviceable, these *Jagdgruppen* tipped the balance in the air to the German advantage, and on 27 August, I./JG 54 achieved its 800th victory while, the next day, I./JG 52 bounced a formation of 15 Soviet aircraft and claimed seven shot down.

> ***"Five Il-2s were sent [against Dugino aerodrome]. Only Dol'nikov returned. . . Why are people being sent to be slaughtered?"***
>
> *Lt. Lyadskiy of Soviet 687 ShAP, 26 August 1942.*

On 28 August, *Major* Hannes Trautloft wrote in his diary: "There are only a few enemy aircraft in the air." After claiming to have shot down 547 Soviet aircraft during the Battle of Rzhev between 30 July and 29 August, the units of *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* had decided the struggle for air superiority on the Central Front in their favour. JG 51 alone was credited with a total of 391 victories in August 1942 and, due mainly to the considerable reinforcement of *Luftwaffenkommando Ost's* fighter force, its bomber and *Stuka* units suffered lower losses than their Soviet counterparts.

It would take the Soviet 1 VA and 3 VA several months to replace the immense aircraft losses, quite apart from the experienced pilot losses, inflicted by *Luftwaffenkommando Ost's* fighter force during the Summer of 1942, but the price for these achievements had been terrible. Although the accumulated rate of attrition had been a serious problem since the opening of *'Barbarossa'*, with few exceptions the *Jagdgruppen* on the Eastern Front were accustomed to achieving high scores in return for relatively light losses. This changed abruptly on the Central Front in August 1942, and it was JG 51, the most successful *Jagdgeschwader* of *'Barbarossa'*, which took the first really heavy beating at the hands of Soviet fighter pilots. JG 51 recorded 101 Bf 109s destroyed or severely damaged due to all causes in August 1942, plus 17 pilots killed, missing, or injured. One possible explanation for JG 51's exceptionally high losses compared to other *Jagdgeschwader* in the East, is that it still operated old, and in many cases pretty worn-out, Bf 109 F-2s.

Aces Over Stalingrad

When Adolf Hitler issued his Order No. 45 directing Army Group B against Stalingrad on 23 July 1942, the VVS units available to meet this advance were meagre and all that could be assembled against von Richthofen's mighty VIII. *Fliegerkorps* was 8 VA. On 22 July, this air army had been reduced to 337 serviceable aircraft, of which one third were obsolescent biplane night bombers. Nevertheless, 8 VA's remaining 85 fighters, 48 *Shturmoviks*, and 88 day bombers were utilised to the maximum.

The majority of the Soviet airmen were inexperienced and ill-trained youngsters, but there were also a few experienced veterans, most notably in *Mayor* Ivan Kleshchyov's 434 IAP, which dealt the German *Stukas* and the Italian Macchi C. 200 escort fighters of 21 *Gruppo Autonomo C.T.* a series of severe losses. However, even the best VVS units suffered dearly at the hands of the *Jagdwaffe's Experten,* the best of whom had reached a level of experience incomparable with any other air force. The *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 52, for example, *Hptm.* Johannes Steinhoff, logged his 600th combat flight during this period, and on 26 July, the II./JG 3 *Rotte* of *Lt.* Joachim Kirschner and *Ofw.* Alfred Heckmann shot down three Yak fighters apiece in only four minutes. Also that day, their *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Kurt Brändle, claimed two Pe-2s and a Yak fighter, bringing his score to 77 victories. 434 IAP registered three Yak-1s, and 512 IAP three Yak-1s and one Yak-7 lost on 26 July, in addition to ten of 8 VA's Il-2s, seven Pe-2s, two Hurricanes, and a U-2.

On the last day of July, Hitler declared "the battle of the Caucasus would be decided at Stalingrad" and instructed the 4th *Panzer* Army to veer to the east from its position

BELOW: Hptm. Johannes Steinhoff, Kommandeur of II./JG 52, seen here in the cockpit of his aircraft in July 1942, in which month he flew his 600th war flight.

south of the River Don in the northern Caucasus, and head towards Stalingrad. Thus the focus of the entire war in the East shifted toward this single city. Stalin's reaction demanded that the troops of the new Stalingrad Front, which had been created in mid-July, should defend Stalingrad "to the last man."

In the intensified air fighting which developed, *Lt.* Hans Roehrig, one of the aces in I./JG 53 *'Pik As'*, was shot down on 6 August in combat with a Soviet fighter pilot, probably *St.Lt.* Mikhail Baranov of 183 IAP, who claimed four victories in a single battle. Four days later, on 10 August, I./JG 53 lost *Lt.* Helmut Macher and *Ofw.* Heinrich Leschert, each with a personal score of 23 victories. An even worse setback was when 9./JG 3's *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Viktor Bauer, was so badly injured that he was rendered unfit for first-line service for the remainder of the war. The loss of this 106-victory ace naturally affected the *Staffel's* combat spirit, and this was not improved when Bauer's successor, 30-victory ace *Lt.* Leutnant Rolf Diergardt, was also shot down in air combat the following day and listed as missing.

However, regardless of the fact that these large-scale air battles inevitably resulted in significant overclaiming, these *Jagdgeschwader* losses are limited compared with the huge victory claims that were made. For example, up until 13 August, units under the command of VIII. *Fliegerkorps* claimed to have shot down 606 Soviet aircraft and destroyed another 107 on the ground during the battle of the Don Bend, but between 20 July and 10 August 8 VA recorded 230 aircraft losses (114 fighters, 70 *Shturmoviks*, 29 Pe-2s, four Su-2s, and 13 night bombers). Similarly, the 315 victory claims filed by 8 VA between 20 July and 10 August were far beyond the actual total, for against 187 Bf 109s or "He 113s" claimed, in the same period *Luftflotte* 4 recorded 62 Bf 109s shot down, destroyed or forced-landed due to battle damage. In other words, whereas the *Luftwaffe* was claiming three aircraft for every one destroyed, the Soviets claimed five.

ABOVE: Soviet troops examining the wreckage of a shot-down Luftwaffe bomber. Of interest is the remarkable contrast between the black of the Balkenkreuz and the Green 70/71 camouflage. When new, these camouflage colours were very dark tones but in certain conditions, soon weathered and faded to a considerable degree. It is thought that this fading was due to the matt finish and composition of the camouflage paints, whereas the paint used for the national markings was manufactured to a semi-gloss specification which proved more stable.

Some 447 replacement aircraft were delivered to 8 VA between 20 July and 17 August, and these made it possible for the VVS to maintain a steady pressure on Army Group B. During five weeks of bloody fighting, the Soviets succeeded in halting Army Group B inside the Don Bend, west of Stalingrad. During this period, the Il-2 *Shturmoviks* played a crucial role in disrupting German movements on the ground and von Richthofen's headquarters received daily requests from the Army for improved protection. In order to deal more effectively with these heavy-armoured ground-attack aircraft, Bf 109s were equipped with an extra pair of wing-mounted MG 151/20 automatic cannon, the so-called *'Gondolwaffen'* .

Between the 11th and 22 August, 8 VA recorded a further 152 operational losses (100 bombers and 52 fighters), as a result of which when *Luftflotte* 4 was deployed against Stalingrad *en masse* to support the ground attack against this city, Soviet air opposition was so weak that only a single Ju 87 and an He 111 were lost to VVS fighters. Everything launched into the air by the Soviets was effectively eliminated by the fighters of JG 3, II./JG 52, *Oblt.* Decker's III./JG 52 detachment and I./JG 53 *'Pik As'*, the three latter units being equipped with the new and improved Bf 109 G-2. On 23 August, *Hptm.* Kurt Brändle, *Kommandeur* of II./JG 3 *'Udet'*, destroyed three VVS aircraft to become the 17th German fighter pilot to exceed the 100-victory mark. Meanwhile, the *Gruppenadjutant* of III./JG 3, *Lt.* Heinrich *Graf* von Einsiedel, shot down a Yak bringing his total to 33, 23 of which had been achieved during the past five weeks. II./JG 52's *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Johannes Steinhoff, surpassed all of this by shooting down five Soviet fighters, raising his tally to 85 victories, and *Lt.* Walter Zellot contributed four of the 17 claimed that day by I./JG 53.

But by displaying an incredible determination, the Soviet pilots day after day continued not only to rise against these hopeless odds, but to strike back. On 25 August, *Lt.* Heinrich *Graf* von Einsiedel barely evaded being shot down by a Soviet fighter and was lucky to escape with light injuries.

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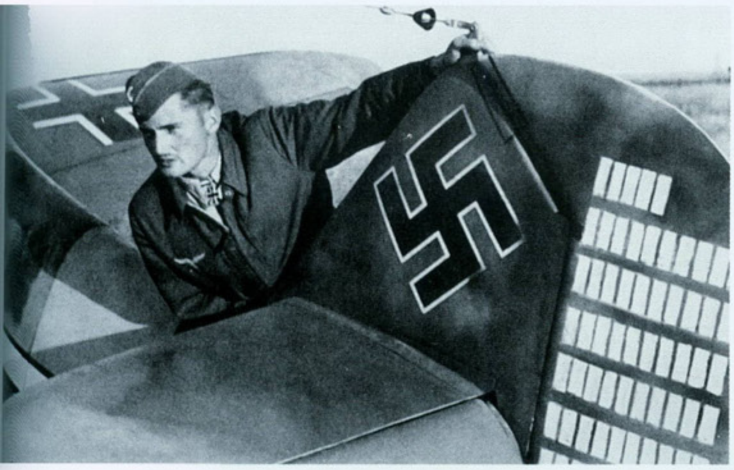
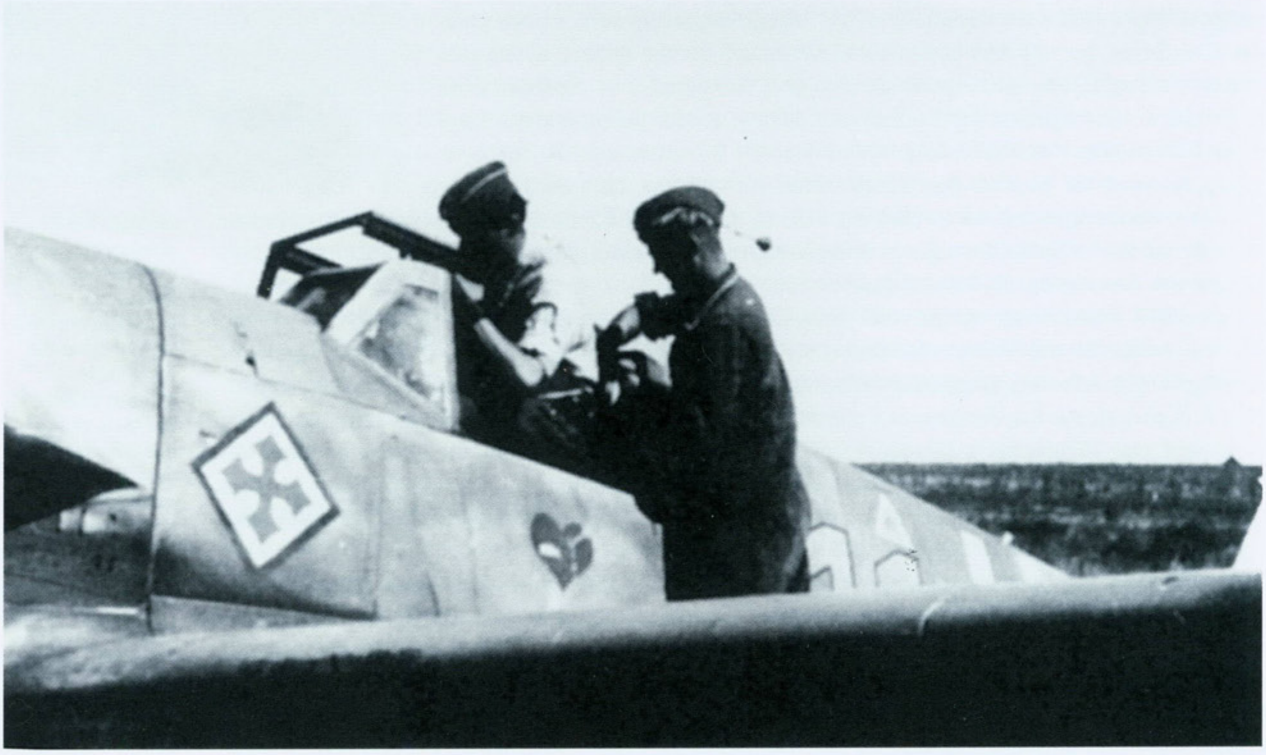
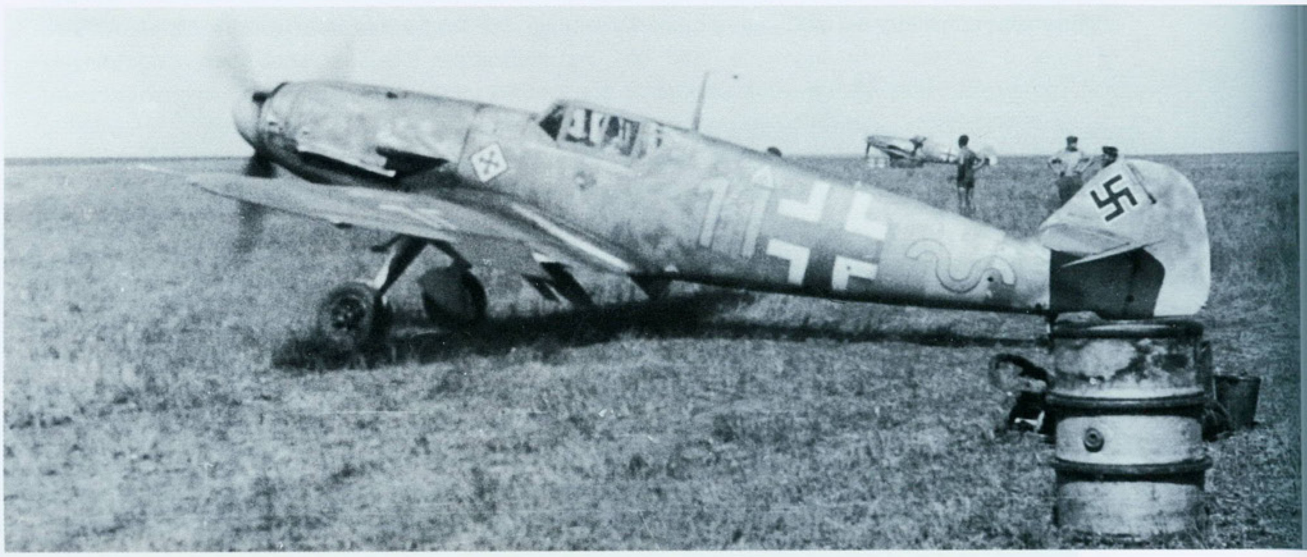


Two days later, 40-victory ace *Oblt.* Otto Decker was shot down and captured by the Soviets who brought him to 41 IAP's air base where he was interrogated by VVS pilots. His place was taken by *Oblt.* Hermann Graf, who in the meantime had increased his tally to 137. On 30 August *Lt.* Heinrich *Graf* von Einsiedel was shot down by Soviet fighters and was captured, a fact which more than pleased the Soviets when they learned that he was not only one of the leading aces in III./JG 3 but also the great grandson of the 'Iron Chancellor', *Prinz* Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of the German Reich.

The fight between the numerically and qualitatively superior VIII. *Fliegerkorps* and the battered VVS was immensely unequal, and by 1 September 8 VA had only 57 serviceable fighters and 32 serviceable Il-2s remaining. On 2 September, I./JG 53 *'Pik As'* claimed 16 of these aircraft shot down, including four by *Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Müller who thereby reached his 70th victory. In 9./JG 52, the *Staffelkapitän* of the *'Karayastaffel'*, *Oblt.* Hermann Graf, scored his 145th kill by bringing down five Soviet aircraft – one of them a lone four-engined Pe-8 – in three separate engagements. Unavoidably, even the renowned Soviet tenacity, which endured throughout most of the Russo-German war, sometimes suffered from such blows and, on 2 September, a demoralised Soviet *Leytenant* defected and landed his MiG-3 on the German aerodrome at Tuzov.



LEFT AND BELOW: 'Yellow 11', a Bf 109 G-2, W.Nr. 13670, of 9./JG 52, was sometimes flown by Hermann Graf in the late Summer of 1942 and it is believed that he may have been flying this machine when he accounted f his 150th victory on 4 September 1942. Th camouflage was the usual 74/75/76 schem and the aircraft carri the badge of III./JG 5 and the red 'Karaya' heart badge of 9. Staffel. Note that th heart is now pierced by an arrow and incorporates the name 'Edda' in white.



The names of the *Jagdgeschwader* in action over Stalingrad, JG 3 *'Udet'* and JG 53 *'Pik As'*, became well-known to all VVS airmen in this area and Soviets even occupied themselves with the single most successful individual ace at Stalingrad, *Oblt.* Graf who, on numerous occasions in September 1942 was personally addressed by Soviet radio operators. Various VVS documents from the time also name Graf, who on 3 September increased his score to 149 victories when he shot down a LaGG-3 and three Yak-1s.

On 4 September, a new air army, 16 VA, was hurriedly made operational at Stalingrad but the reports after its first day of operations were gloomy. Twenty aircraft were reported lost, including 17 Yak-1s from 220 IAD alone, one of them being Graf's 150th victory.

On 6 September, JG 3's Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke who, although only holding the rank of *Hauptmann*, commanded the German fighters at Stalingrad, accounted for his 100th victory, for which he was awarded the Oak Leaves, and in I./JG 53, *Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Müller increased his tally to 75 when he shot down three Soviet aircraft on this date. 16 VA recorded another 24 aircraft lost on 8 September, a large part of them to I./JG 53, which reported a total of 30 victories that day, four of them being credited to *Fw.* Wilhelm Crinius. In return, I./JG 53 lost three Bf 109s and two of its greatest aces; *Ofw.* Alfred Franke, with 59 victories, perished when he was shot down by an Il-2, the pilot of which was awarded the Order of Lenin, and *Ofw.* Hans Kornatz with 36 victories, who survived with injuries.

Meanwhile, the ground troops of 6th Army and 4th *Panzer* Army were unable to break Soviet resistance at Stalingrad, and a contributing factor to the Soviets' defensive success was the relentless attacks carried out by Il-2s against all German troop movements on the ground. Combating the Il-2s therefore remained the German fighter pilots' main task and, on 9 September, *'Pik As'* ace *Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Müller broke all his previous records by claiming six Il-2s shot down with his *'Gondola'*-armed Bf 109 in a single combat.

Only 12 miles west of Stalingrad, III./JG 3, I./JG 53 and *Oblt.* Graf's III./JG 52 detachment were brought forward to Pitomnik aerodrome, and on 10 September I./JG 53 *'Pik As'* scored 22 victories, including four by *Fw.* Wilhelm Crinius, who thus ran up his tally to 69. *Uffz.* Heinrich Wöhrle also brought down four Soviet aircraft on this day, but it ended with Wöhrle being shot down and injured. Also on 10 September, *Fw.* Franz Hagedorn, who previously had served as Crinius's wingman, was killed in combat with Il-2s shortly after scoring his 37th victory and another serious loss to I./JG 53 occurred when *Lt.* Walter Zellot was shot down and killed over Stalingrad. With 85 victories to his credit, Zellot was the top-scorer in I./JG 53 at that time.

To describe fully the huge air battles which took place over Stalingrad would require more space than available here, but it should be emphasised that the German aces had to fight hard to maintain their superiority against an enemy which defied losses and continuously sent new air units into the skies over the city. This is best illustrated by figures relating to just one *Jagdgruppe*, I./JG 53, which although claiming 230 Soviet aircraft destroyed in the three weeks following the opening of the offensive across the River Don, also reported that in the same period 25 per cent of its pilots had been killed, missing or injured.

On 11 September, 9./JG 52's *Oblt.* Graf spotted a formation of 270 BAD Pe-2s at 9,000 feet over Stalingrad's industrial area. A group of Bf 109s from another unit intercepted the bombers, and before he was able to intervene, Graf saw two Bf 109s being shot down by the Soviet rear gunners. Graf then attacked and managed to shoot down a Pe-2 before he found himself under attack by a formation of Soviet fighters, and the German ace was himself almost shot down before he finally destroyed one of his adversaries. Thus Graf, by this time the leading fighter ace of the war, achieved his 164th victory. Another pilot with great achievements over Stalingrad was I./JG 53's *Fw.*Wilhelm Crinius. Of 29 Soviet aircraft shot down by I./JG 53 between 12th and 14 September, ten fell to the guns of Crinius's Bf 109 G-2.

The losses sustained by the Soviet airmen, mainly due to a handful of *Jagdwaffe Experten*, is clearly displayed by the statistics of 220 IAD which comprised four regiments of Yaks; 43 IAP, 237 IAP, 581 IAP, and 867 IAP. On 4 September, this unit had 42 aircraft available but between the 1st and 15 September lost 58, a loss rate of 138 per cent in two weeks.

Worse was to follow, for the Soviet airmen in the Stalingrad area were opposed by probably the strongest concentration of fighter aces ever assembled in such a limited area. By this time, only about 40 serviceable German fighters remained for action over Stalingrad but, according to the British and US practice of considering a pilot with five or more victories an ace, the majority of the German fighter pilots who flew over Stalingrad were aces. This was not the result of any deliberate policy, but was due mainly to the large-scale air fighting of the past weeks. The *Geschwaderstab* of JG 3, with only two operational

ABOVE: German soldiers in the ruins of Stalingrad. After a series of piecemeal attacks which the Soviets destroyed, a major German assault succeeded in reaching the suburbs, but once German troops attempted to move into the built-up areas, the battle developed into two months of bitter house-to-house fighting during which neither side gained any advantage. While holding off the German attack, the Soviets prepared a massive counterattack.

Bf 109s, was led by *Hptm.* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke, victor in more than 100 aerial combats. Wilcke frequently flew his missions with *Hptm.* Walther Dahl, who would score his 20th victory on 19 September.

III./JG 3, which had only ten operational Bf 109s available, was commanded by 35-victory ace *Hptm.* Wolfgang Ewald. In this *Gruppe, Lt.* Wilhelm Lemke achieved his 61st kill on 16 September. On the same day, *Fw.* Siegfried Engfer reached his 48th by knocking down three Il-2s, and *Fw.* Heinz Kemethmüller achieved his 49th victory.

I./JG 53 *'Pik As'*, the most powerful *Jagdgruppe* at Pitomnik, was now down to 14 operational Bf 109s. On 16 September, this *Gruppe's Oblt.* Wolfgang Tonne claimed five kills to bring his total to 86 victories, while *Hptm.* Friedrich-Karl Müller and *Fw.* Wilhelm Crinius downed four each, both reaching a total of 87. At the same time, *Lt.* Hans Roehrig achieved his 46th, and *Uffz.* Heinz Golinski scored his 37th and 38th. In the III./JG 52 detachment, *Ofw.* Heinrich Füllgrabe and *Lt.* Ernst Süss both had around fifty victories, *Uffz.* Johann Kalb had achieved 32, and *Uffz.* Hermann Wolf scored his 23rd by shooting down a Yak-1 on 15 September. The commander of this formation, *Oblt.* Graf, was the war's top-scoring fighter ace by that time and at 07.35 hrs on 16 September, he destroyed an Su-2 as his 173rd victory, followed four minutes later by a Kittyhawk from 731 IAP. Afterwards, as Graf landed, he received the news that he had been awarded the Diamonds, Germany's highest military award.

And still the relentless fighting continued. Concentrated at Stalingrad was a large proportion of the best VVS pilots, including female fighter pilots such as Lidiya Litvyak, and also its best fighter aircraft; Yak-1s, Yak-7Bs and La-5s. On 16 September, the crack Soviet fighter unit 434 IAP attacked a group of Ju 87s escorted by Bf 109s and claimed two Ju 87s and two Bf 109s shot down, one of each being claimed by the unit commander, *Mayor* Ivan Kleshchyov. In this engagement, *Uffz.* Johann Kalb, the 32-victory ace who served as Graf's wingman, was shot down but baled out of his blazing Bf 109 G-2 coded 'Black <4' and landed in the Volga. He swam to the river bank where Soviet soldiers were waiting to take him prisoner.

Never before had there been such vast air fighting over such a small area as the ruined city of Stalingrad. On 18 September, all available aircraft on both sides clashed violently as the Soviets made a fruitless attempt to counter-attack north of Stalingrad. German fighters claimed 77 victories for a single loss, and 9./JG 52's Hermann Graf, newly promoted to *Hauptmann,* achieved his 180th victory by destroying in a single sortie two LaGG-3s and an Il-2. In I./JG 53, *Hptm.* Müller exceeded the five *Abschüsse* per day he had twice claimed previously and shot down seven, thus reaching a tally of 99.

BELOW: During the offensive against Stalingrad Hptm. Friedrich-Karl Müller, Kommandeur of I./JG 53, was one of the 'Pik As' Geschwader's greatest aces and increased his victory tally from 60 to 101. In this photograph, taken on 19 September, Hptm. Müller is seen returning from the sortie in which he accounted for his 100th victory. On the 23rd, Müller received the Oak Leaves.

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Oblt. Tonne and *Fw.* Crinius of the same unit, and JG 3's *Hptm.* Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke and *Fw.* Heinz Kemethmüller, each shot down four aircraft on 18 September. Counted among the Soviet losses on this day alone were several aces and Heroes of the Soviet Union, as well as *St.Lt.* Vladimir Mikoyan, the son of the Prime Minister of the USSR, Anastas Mikoyan.

Despite the bloodletting of 18 September, the survivors of the Soviet air forces were despatched to provide air support for yet another fruitless counter-attack on 19 September. Two *tarans* – air-to-air rammings – were recorded over Stalingrad that day, but over a dozen cases of such acts of self-sacrifice were carried out by young VVS pilots over the city in September 1942 alone.

ABOVE: On 26 September 1942, Hptm. Hermann Graf became the first pilot to reach 200 victories.

On 22 September, I./JG 53's *Oblt.* Tonne and *Fw.* Wilhelm Crinius both became the next pilots to claim 100 victories. The three leading aces in I./JG 53 *'Pik As'* – Müller, Tonne, and Crinius were all awarded the Oak Leaves on the 23rd and 24 September, Crinius receiving the Knight's Cross and Oak Leaves simultaneously. The achievements of these three *'Pik As'* aces were indeed outstanding, for since the opening of the offensive against Stalingrad one month previously, *Hptm.* Müller had increased his victory tally from 60 to 101, and Tonne from 68 to 101. Perhaps most remarkable of all was the career of 21 year-old Wilhelm Crinius who had flown his first combat sortie as a *Gefreiter* with I./JG 53 just seven months previously and had only claimed his first two victories on 9 June 1942. In little over three months, he had then increased his tally to 101, of which 57 were claimed within the last four weeks.

Towards the end of September, I./JG 53 *'Pik As'* left Pitomnik for a badly needed period of rest and refitting in Germany. The impact of this *Gruppe* over Stalingrad had been so great that, for many years after the war, it was mentioned in various Soviet accounts, including the memoirs of aircraft designer Aleksandr Yakovlev, who specifically referred to the "renowned 'Ace of Spades' Wing."

Only the achievements of *Hptm.* Hermann Graf, commander of the *'Karayastaffel',* surpassed those of the *'Pik As' Experten.* Graf's most successful day occurred on 23 September when, on his first mission early in the morning, he and *Fw.* Heinrich Füllgrabe engaged two Il-2s and five Soviet fighters 30 miles behind the Volga. In a 20-minute combat, the two German aces despatched six of the Soviet aircraft in flames, four by Graf, and two by Füllgrabe. During his fourth sortie that day, in three minutes Graf also shot down a Yak-1 and two Su-2s, Finally, during a mission two hours later, the German ace managed to shoot down two Yak-1s and a LaGG-3, thereby having accounted for ten aircraft in the one day. With this, Hermann Graf's total tally stood at 197.

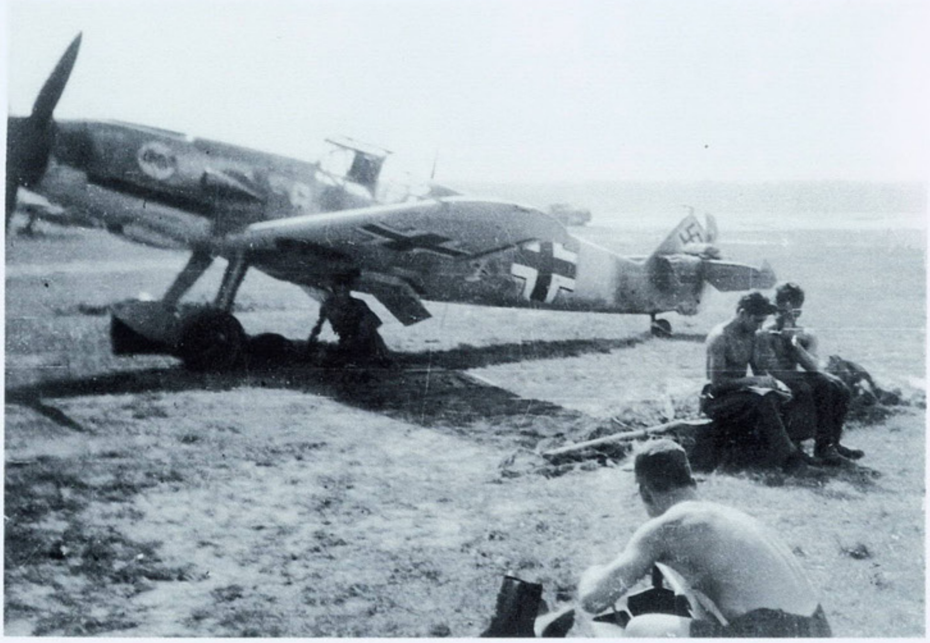
Needless, to say, the intense air operations over Stalingrad began to take its toll and after six weeks of fighting, pilots of Graf's detachment from III./JG 52 began to show signs of mental and physical exhaustion. *Fw.* Füllgrabe, Graf's wingman, who had just reached his 50th victory, suffered a nervous breakdown and was grounded. About this time, Graf himself noted in his diary, "I had to take a day's rest," adding, "I just couldn't take any more." Nevertheless, Graf would not leave before he had become the first pilot to reach the magical 200-victory mark. This he did on 26 September, and he and his detachment left Stalingrad. Hermann Graf, the most successful fighter pilot in the world, was sent home to Germany – with strict orders to avoid air combat – and I./JG 3 and I./JG 52 arrived at Pitomnik to take the place of the departing fighter units.

In only five weeks over Stalingrad, the *Jagdflieger* claimed almost 1,000 victories against true Soviet losses in September of 503 recorded by 8 VA, 163 by 16 VA and 36 by 102 IAD/PVO. From the Soviet viewpoint, these figures were discouraging enough, but since average aircraft strength at that time was only slightly above 300 aircraft, the total of these losses, 702 aircraft, represents a loss rate in five weeks of 234 per cent. Little wonder that Soviet ace *Mayor* Boris Yeryomin later wrote, "Throughout the entire war, I never saw more fierce and stiff air combats than those in the skies above Stalingrad."

By early October, the VVS had virtually disappeared from the skies over Stalingrad.

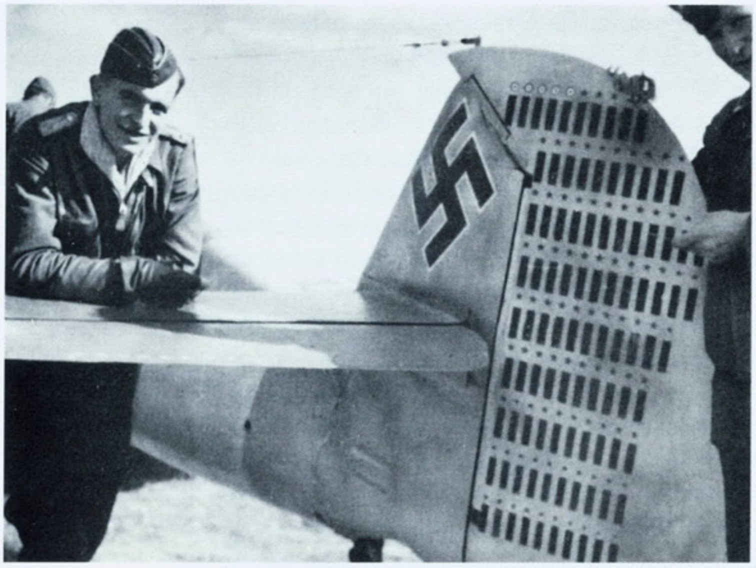
ABOVE: Oblt. Helmut Mertens of I./JG 3 in September 1942 celebrating his 50th victory. Below the armoured windscreen is the Gruppe's crossed-swords badge.

ABOVE: In the bright mid-Summer nights in the north, some of JG 54's pilots carried out night attacks against Soviet transport aircraft flying in supplies to surrounded Soviet troops near Lyuban. Here, Oblt. Günther Fink of 8./JG 54 is seen on his return from a successful sortie on the night of 10 June when he and Lt. Hans-Joachim Heyer shot down five Soviet transport aircraft. Fink claimed a total of nine such nocturnal victories over the Lyuban pocket.

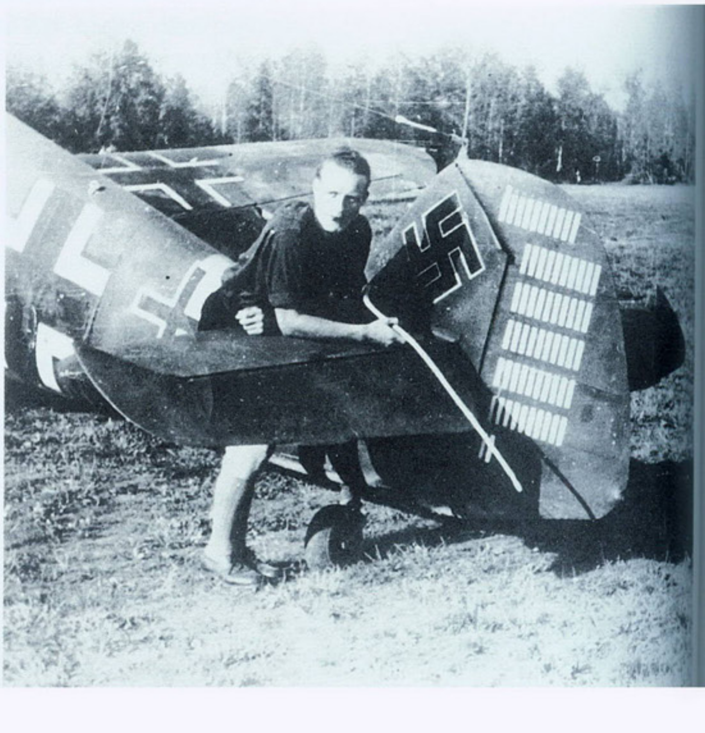


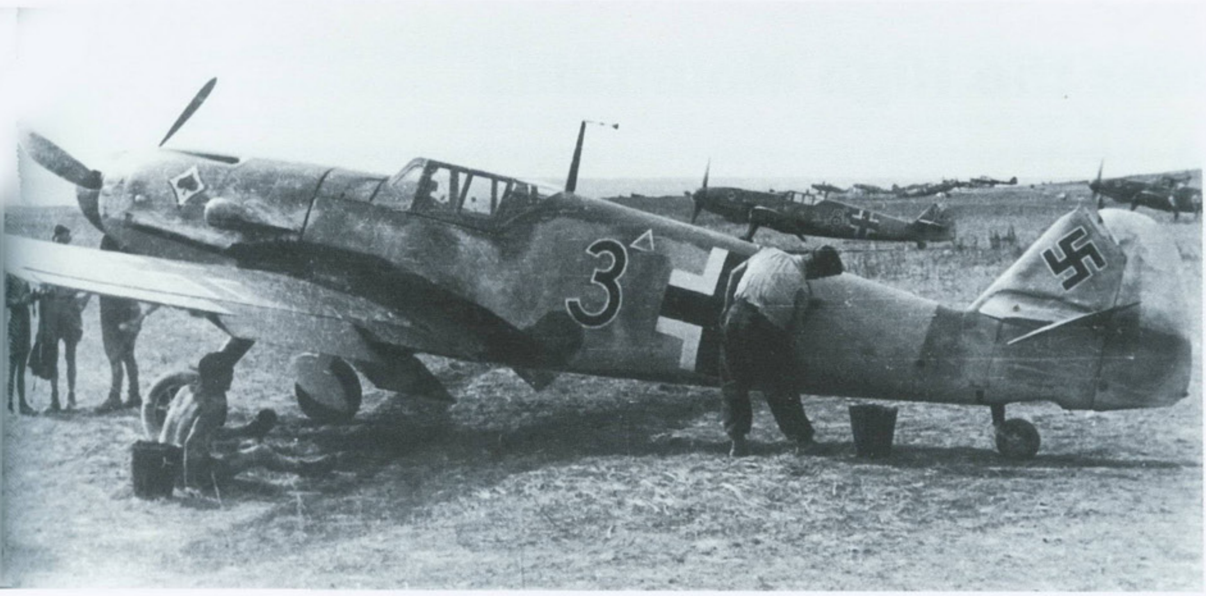
LEFT: A Bf 109 F of I./JG 51 in the Summer of 1942

BELOW: Ofw. Heinrich Klöpper of 11./JG 51 and the tail of his aircraft showing the IV. Gruppe symbol aft of the fuselage Balkenkreuz and the rudder marked with 62 victory bars. On 4 September 1942 by which time Klöpper's victories numbered 65, he was awarded the Knight's Cross. Subsequently transferred to the West, he attained the rank of Oberleutnant and finally became Staffelkapitän of 7./JG 1. With 94 victories, he was posted missing on 29 November 1943.

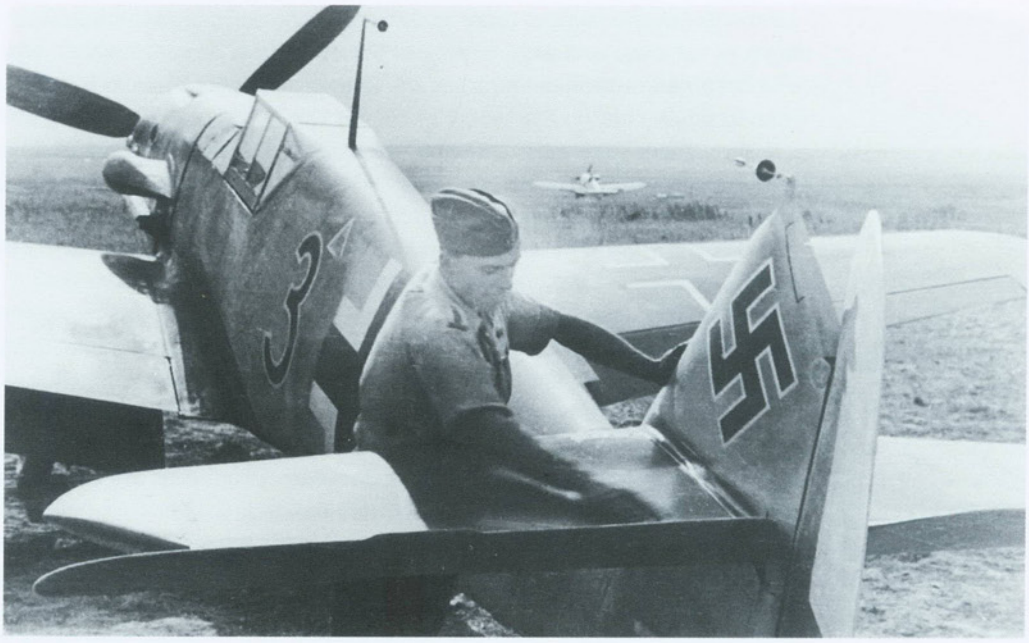


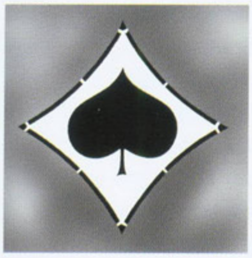
ABOVE: Hptm. Wolfgang Tonne, Staffelkapitän of 3./JG 53, shown with his rudder marked with 95 victories while operating in the Stalingrad area in September 1942. By the 22nd, Tonne's victories had increased to 101 and on the 24th he was awarded the Oak Leaves.





BOVE AND RIGHT: Two views of Bf 109 G-2 ack 3', one of the first Bf 109 G-2s to be livered to 2./JG 53, photographed in mid-July 42. In the huge air battles which took place er Stalingrad, I./JG 53 claimed 230 Soviet rcraft destroyed in the three weeks following e opening of the offensive over the River on, but in the same period lost 25 per cent of pilots killed, missing or injured. In ptember, I. Gruppe was withdrawn to ermany for refitting and then transferred to e Mediterranean theatre.

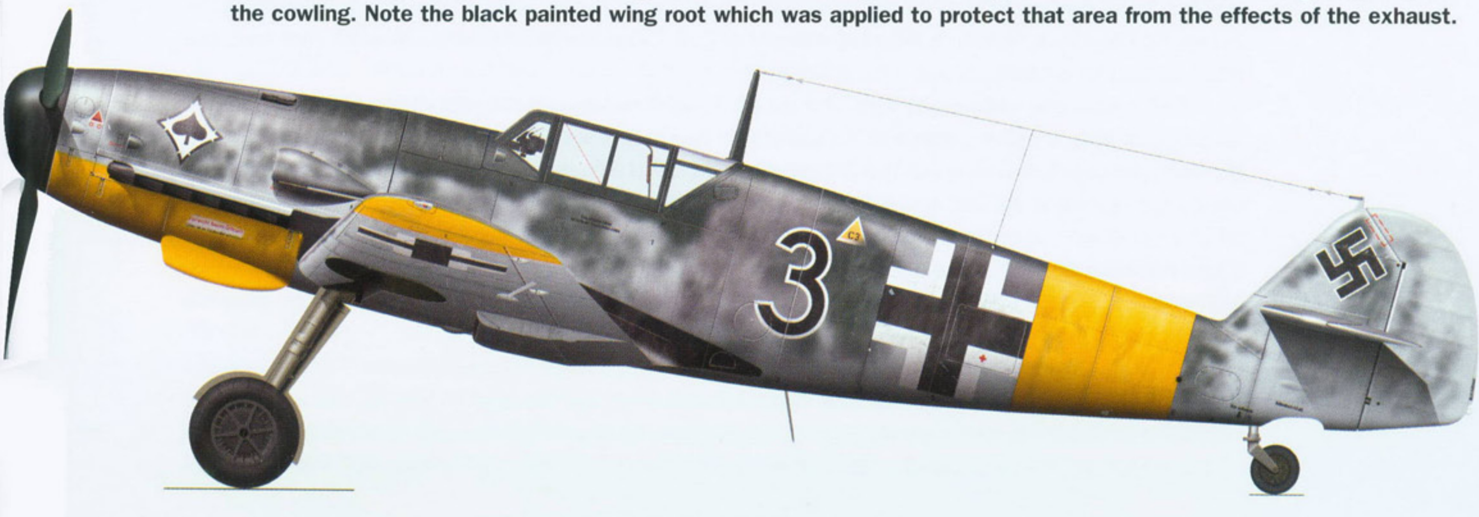




Badge of JG 53

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 'Black 3' of 2./JG 53, July 1942

Shown as it appeared during the advance towards Stalingrad, this aircraft was finished in a standard 74/75/76 camouflage with yellow theatre markings and carried a wide yellow fuselage band and the 'Pik As' badge of JG 53 on the cowling. Note the black painted wing root which was applied to protect that area from the effects of the exhaust.



Over the High Mountains

Meanwhile, 4 VA and 5 VA, the Soviet air armies in the Caucasus, were advocating increasing the pressure on German Army Group A. It is obvious that the weak *Luftwaffe* forces which remained in the Caucasus in early September were inadequate to meet this challenge, but the extent of the sometimes alleged Soviet numerical superiority in this area in the Autumn of 1942 is a misconception. In fact, in September 1942, each side mustered between 200 and 250 operational aircraft in the Caucasus.

With bombers forming the main part of VVS forces, most notably lend-lease Bostons grouped into 219 BAD, 4 VA was able to gain the initiative. To counter this, in early September, II./JG 52 was transferred to the Caucasus from the Stalingrad area. The air fighting on 6 September is indicative of the entire situation: 4 VA conducted 460 sorties and claimed the destruction of 14 German tanks, plus a direct bomb hit on the German assault bridge across the Terek at Mozdok, and sank seven troop ferries. In return, 219 BAD alone lost three Boston bombers and three LaGG-3 escort fighters. Two of the latter fell prey to 8./JG 52's *Staffelkapitän, Oblt.* Günther Rall, at 09.55 and 10.35 hrs. 7./JG 52's *Ofw.* Alfred Grislawski destroyed a LaGG-3 and a Boston, while his wingman *Fw.* Edmund Rossmann shot down two I-16s and one LaGG-3. *Hptm.* Rudolf Resch, *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 52, claimed II./JG 52's first victory in this sector by scoring his 50th victory.

On 8 September, the team of Grislawski and Rossmann encountered a formation of 219 BAD Bostons escorted by a large number of Soviet fighters. While Rossmann attracted the attention of the escort fighters, Grislawski attacked the Bostons and shot down four within two minutes - his 47th to 50th victories.

Throughout September 1942, 4 VA lost a total of 149 aircraft in combat, with 88 pilots killed or missing in action. The bulk of these losses were due to II. and III./JG 52, at a cost of 11 Bf 109s shot down in the southern Caucasus. III./JG 52 had received its worst loss on the 29th, when 68-victory ace *Ofw.* Kurt Ratzlaff was shot down by an La-5 from the 131 IAP, *Kapitan* Dmitriy Sigov and *Kapitan* Dmitriy Nazarenko each claiming a Bf 109 destroyed in this engagement.

The most successful German fighter pilot in the Caucasus in September 1942 was *Oblt.* Rall, who during the month added another 28 victories to his tally bringing his total to 90. Rall achieved his 100th victory on 22 October and was awarded the Oak Leaves, but the relentless fight in the air continued, with 6./JG 52's *Lt.* Walter Krupinski being rammed by an I-16 on 25 October, shortly after the German ace had achieved his 53rd victory. Krupinski nevertheless survived whereas his opponent perished. Four days later Krupinski was awarded the *Ritterkreuz* while the Soviet pilot who had rammed him posthumously received the Order of the Red Banner.

JG 52's aces definitely had the upper hand during the aerial combats over the Caucasus throughout the Autumn of 1942. On 26 October, 131 IAP's *Kapitan* Dmitriy Sigov (15 victories, including six shared) was shot down and killed when his La-5 was attacked from above by two Bf 109s. On 29 October, when II./JG 52 attained its 1,000th victory, 236 IAD's ace *Podpolkovnik* Dmitriy Kalarash (17 victories, including six shared) was killed in combat with Bf 109s. He probably fell victim to either 15.(*Kroat*)/JG 52's pilots *Natporucnik* Ljudevit Bencetic or *Zastavnik* Slavko Boskic, each of whom claimed a LaGG-3, or 4./JG 52's *Oblt.* Gerhard Barkhorn, who claimed a "Yak-1" as his 75th victory. Incidentally, cases of misidentification frequently arose as such Soviet in-line engined fighter types as the Yak-1, Yak-7, Yak-9, LaGG-3 and MiG-3 all had appearances so similar that accurate identification in air combat was very difficult.

On the last day of October, 7./JG 52's *Ofw.* Josef Zwernemann surpassed his 100-victory mark, but one of the toughest *Jagdwaffe Experten* in the Caucasus during this period was the young *Oberfeldwebel* Alfred Grislawski. On 2 November, his 23rd birthday, Grislawski became involved in an air battle with some I-153s, during which he shot down one in flames. The pilot of the blazing aircraft, Aleksandr Klubov, managed to crash-land and, although badly burned, survived later to become one of the war's most famous VVS aces with 31 personal and 19 shared victories. Three days later Grislawski achieved his 66th victory after shooting down four Il-2s, one of which was flown by a leading ace of the Guards unit 7 GShAP.

Although Grislawski was not as concerned about personal victory scores as several other *Luftwaffe* aces, III./JG 52's *Gruppenkommandeur, Major* Hubertus von Bonin regarded him as one of the unit's most important pilots and a cornerstone in the *Gruppe*. Von Bonin even placed Grislawski as his own *Rottenführer* on some occasions, and when a young and talented *Leutnant* by the name of Erich

Hartmann joined III./JG 52 from an *Ergänzungsgruppe*, von Bonin instructed the team of Grislawski and Rossmann to teach Hartmann the necessities of air combat. Hartmann not only absorbed what was required but, using the knowledge gained as a basis, later developed into the war's most successful fighter ace. As an interesting aside, it was Grislawski who also gave Hartmann his famous nickname "Bubi", or "Little Boy".

The VVS Routed

When, in the Spring of 1942, Hitler realised his mistake in not capturing Leningrad in the Autumn of 1941, he decided to correct it. A plan of attack was drawn up but, on 27 August 1942, while German forces were still deploying, the Soviet Army launched a powerful attack of its own to sever the German-held corridor on the southern shore of Lake Ladoga. All the reserves that the Germans had assembled for the attack on Leningrad therefore became involved in a defensive, rather than offensive battle.

In the event, although its attack was spoiled, Army Group North, and in particular 18th Army, was able to hold its positions, largely due to operations by *Luftflotte* 1. This in turn was because, despite a numerical disadvantage, the fighters of JG 54 were able to master the situation in the air. In early September, there were about 550 aircraft of VVS-KBF, VVS-Leningrad Front and 14 VA in the area, and although this gave the VVS a two-fold numerical superiority over the *Luftwaffe*, the Soviets still managed to lose their air superiority. During the first two days of September, JG 54 recorded 42 Soviet aircraft shot down, after which a decrease in Soviet air activity in the sector south of Lake Ladoga was noted.

Meanwhile, southwards on the Central Front, Soviet 1 VA and 3 VA were in no position to regain their air superiority and the units from JG 54 which had arrived to bolster *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* could return to *Luftflotte* 1. *Luftwaffenkommando Ost's* remaining fighter units – Stab, II., III., IV. and 15.(*Span*)/JG 51, plus I./JG 52, with a total of over 100 serviceable Bf 109s – were in firm control of the air. On 5 September, *Major* Joachim Müncheberg, JG 51's acting *Geschwaderkommodore*, achieved his 100th victory.

When I./JG 52 returned to *Luftflotte* 4 in the south, *Major* Kurt Brändle's II./JG 3 *'Udet'* was allocated to *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* and arrived just in time to help counter a Soviet assault against the German positions at Zubtsov, southeast of Rzhev. On 14 September, both 1 VA and 3 VA were concentrated to attack the German ground troops in this area, but at around 10.00 hrs on 14 September, *Hptm.* Hartmann Grasser's II./JG 51 engaged numerous Il-2s with fighter escort and claimed 12 shot down against a single loss of their own. In total, JG 51 accounted for 21, including five shot down by II./JG 51's *Ofw.* Otto Tange, which brought his score to 68, and three by *Major* Müncheberg.

In the area immediately south of Lake Ladoga, *Major* Gordon Gollob, the top-scoring fighter ace who had recently been grounded following the award of the Diamonds, arrived from the Caucasus to assume command of *Luftflotte* 1's fighter units. Two *Jagdgruppen* also brought in from Germany to strengthen Gollob's force were *Hptm.* Kurt Ubben's Bf 109 G-2-equipped III./JG 77, and *Hptm.* Heinrich Krafft's I./JG 51 with its new Fw 190 A fighters. Thus the Fw 190 A, which had first been introduced to front-line units in France a year earlier, finally arrived on the Eastern Front, although at first neither of these units saw much combat.

The lack of opposition by the VVS is indicated by the fact that JG 54 achieved an average of no more than six aerial victories each day during the period from the 9th to 20 September and in this period lost only six Bf 109s destroyed or severely damaged due to hostile action. Among these casualties was 9./JG 54's *Ofw.* Wilhelm Schilling, who was awarded the German Cross in Gold on 13 September. Three days later, shortly after achieving his 46th victory, Schilling was pursuing a formation of Il-2s which had attacked Tosno railway station when anti-aircraft fire scored a direct hit on his aircraft and shattered one of his legs. Despite great pain and loss of blood, the 25 year-old *Oberfeldwebel* managed to nurse his Bf 109 to the advanced airstrip at Mga and was immediately taken to hospital. Another casualty in one the few aerial encounters on the Northern Front was 49-victory ace *Fw.* Peter Siegler of 3./JG 54 who was killed on 24 September.

Largely due to the support from the air, German troops were able to encircle the Soviet 6th Guards Corps west of Gaytolovo on 25 September. On 26 September, the Leningrad Front made a last attempt to cross the Neva River at Dubrovka and push across the German corridor. There is some evidence to suggest that VVS airmen were not giving of their best at this time, as Josef Stalin personally intervened and sent a harshly-worded telegram to 14 VA threatening to court-martial any Soviet fighter pilot who avoided combat with German fighters. It is reported that this apparently had some effect, although 6th Guards' attack was unsuccessful.

On 26 September, II./JG 54's *Oblt.* Hans Beisswenger achieved his 100th victory and on the 29th, *Major* Gollob's fighters shot down more than 20 VVS aircraft, one of which, a LaGG-3, was the 50th victory for *Oblt.* Hans-Ekkehard Bob of 9./JG 54. The only loss sustained by JG 54 *'Grünherz'* on that date was a Bf 109 piloted by the Technical Officer of III. *Gruppe, Lt.* Erwin Leykauf, credited with 25 victories, who was pursuing an Il-2 over Dubrovka when his aircraft was severely hit by enemy fire and Leykauf's arm was injured by a machine-gun bullet. He succeeded in baling out and was rescued from no-man's-land by German soldiers of the 227th Infantry Division.

On 30 September, pilots of JG 54 claimed another 15 victories and while I./JG 51's *Gruppenkommandeur, Hptm.* Krafft, achieved his 60th victory, III./JG 77's *Hptm.* Kurt Ubben increased his score to 92 by downing a Yak-1.

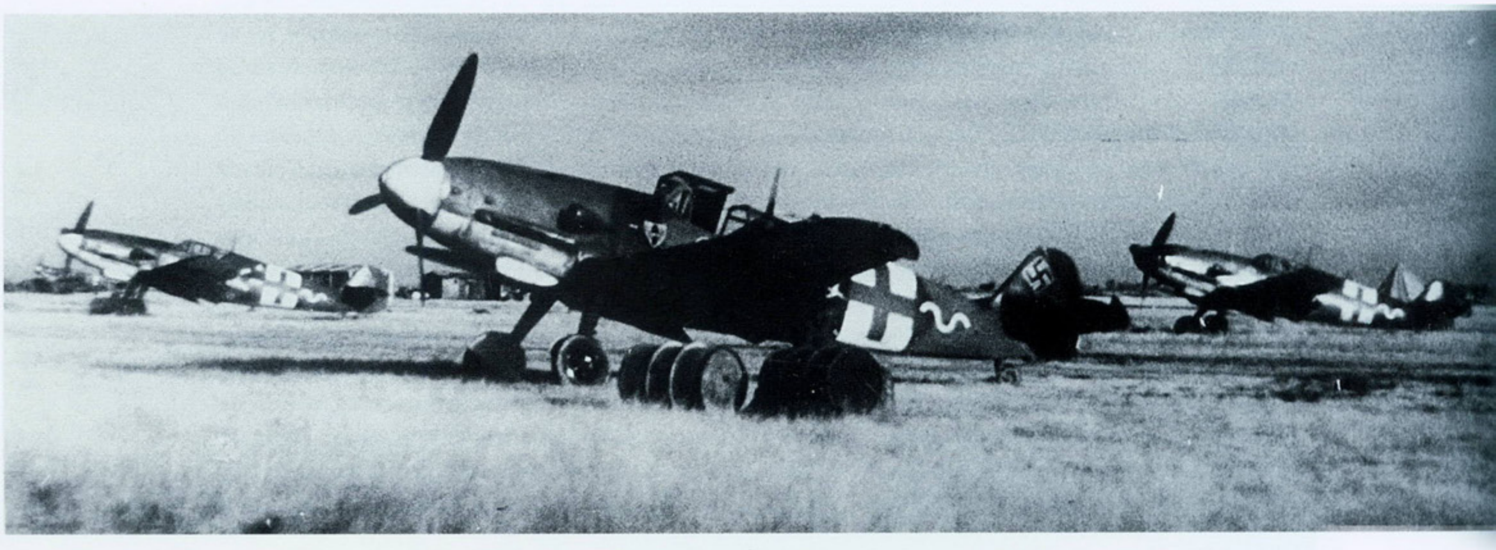
By now, Army Groups North and Centre had lost the initiative and were being forced onto the defensive. Moreover, during the Autumn of 1942, and despite its previous losses, the VVS again started to rebuild its strength. On the German side, however, fighter *Gruppen* were being transferred, some to other theatres. Three of the *Jagdgruppen* which had been deployed on the Northern and Central Fronts, II./JG 3, II./JG 51 and III./JG 77, had to be transferred elsewhere, the latter two *Gruppen* going to the Mediterranean area. With the departure of II./JG 51, *Luftwaffenkommando Ost* lost its most successful *Jagdgruppe*. Of the 11 *Ritterkreuzträger* serving with JG 51 at that time, six belonged to II. *Gruppe* and included such formidable fighter pilots as *Hptm.* Hartmann Grasser with 92 victories, *Fw.* Anton Hafner with 62 and *Uffz.* Kurt Knappe, who scored his 51st and last victory on the Eastern Front on 4 October 1942.

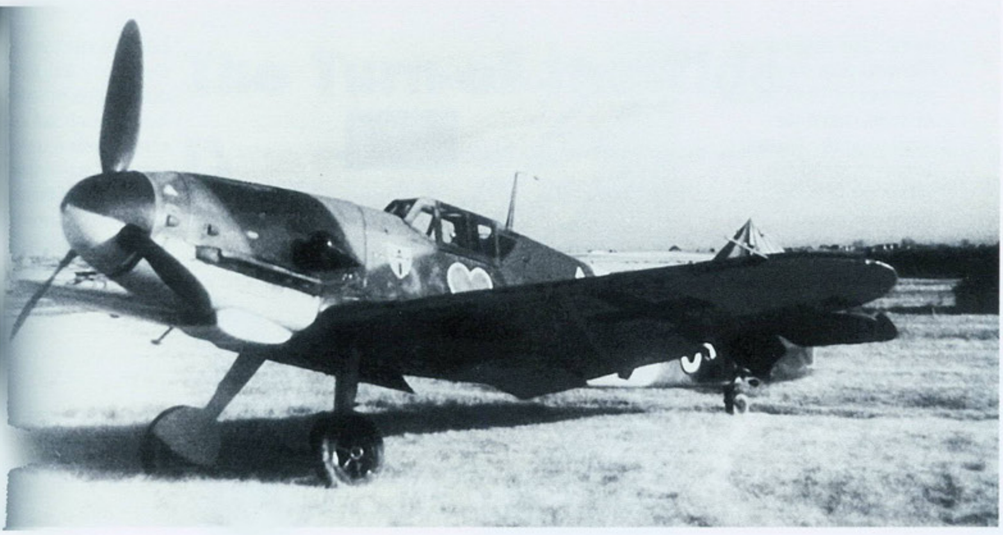
On 7 October, JG 54 lost another of its *Ritterkreuzträger, Oblt.* Joachim Wandel, the *Staffelkapitän* of 5./JG 54, when he and his wingman, *Uffz.* Ransmeyer, engaged two Yak-1s near Ostashkov. Wandel claimed one of the Soviet fighters shot down, but was then himself shot down by the other. This was Wandel's 75th and last victory.

Worse was to come, and on 9 November, 3 VA's fighter pilots managed to deal their enemy two heavy blows, both in the Velikiye Luki – Vitebsk sector, where Kalinin Front held its western-most positions. The first occurred over German-held territory near Gorodok, slightly north of Vitebsk, when a Soviet fighter sweep resulted in a combat during which III./JG 54's 53-victory ace *Lt.* Hans-Joachim Heyer was killed. In return, *Hptm.* Hans Knauth, *Kommandeur* of IV./JG 51 sent some of the Bf 109s under his command on fighter sweeps from the airfield at Vitebsk. One of the flights was led by the *Staffelkapitän* of 10./JG 51, *Lt.* Franz-Josef Beerenbrock, by that time the leading ace in JG 51 *'Mölders'*. During the past eight days, Beerenbrock had increased his victory score by ten, reaching a total of 114. Beerenbrock's formation had just crossed the frontline at Velizh, 40 miles north-east of Vitebsk, when they encountered a formation of 3 VA fighters and a stiff combat ensued *Lt.* Beerenbrock once again displayed his superior skills by shooting down three Soviet aircraft in quick succession but was suddenly heard calling over the R/T, "I'm hit in the radiator! Attempting a *Bauchlandung*!" His Bf 109 F-2, 'White 12', was then seen skidding along on the ground, after which the pilot was observed climbing from the cockpit and preparing himself for the inevitable capture.

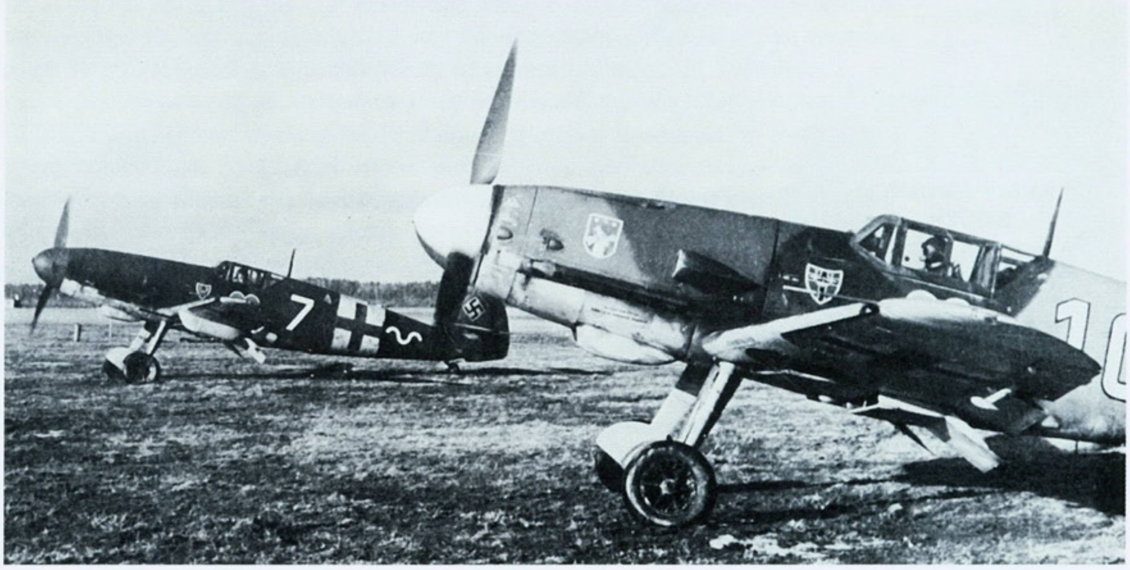
In November 1942, 1 VA and 3 VA had gathered almost 1,400 aircraft – more than 1,000 in 3 VA alone – and were preparing to support the pending Winter offensive planned to destroy Army Group Centre.

Bf 109 G's of III./JG 54 with uppersurfaces camouflaged in a two-tone scheme which first appeared in 1942. Note that on these machines, the yellow fuselage band has been applied in such a way that the Balkenkreuz appears superimposed upon it.

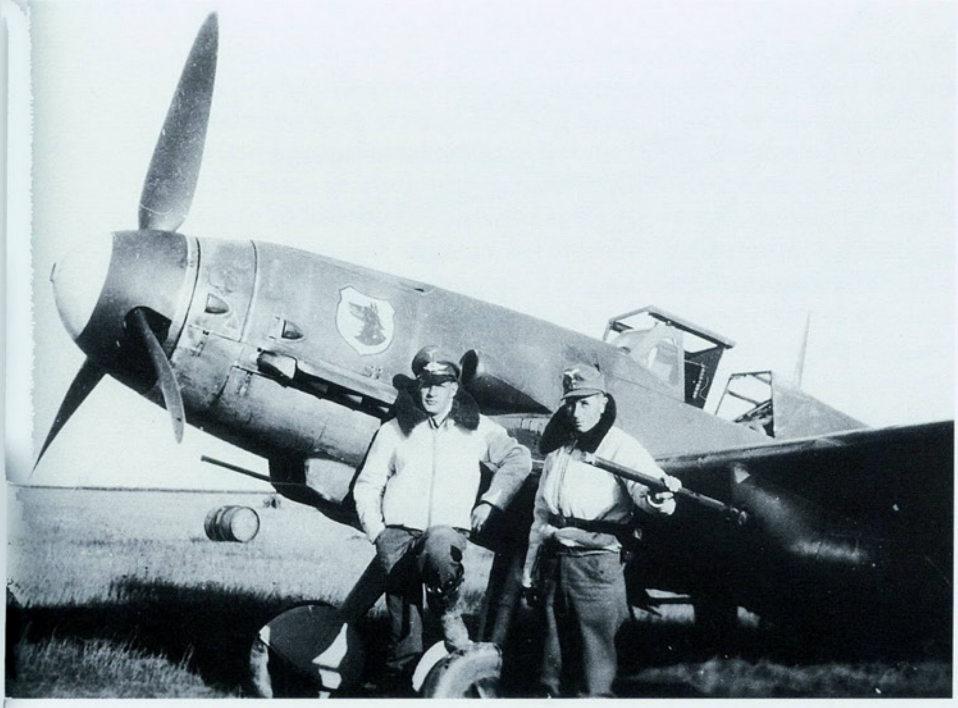




LEFT: The precise colours and colour combinations used by JG 54 are still the subject of much controversy among those interested in this subject. Some sources suggest that a light tan may have been used in combination with the greens and, despite the lightening effect of the bright sunlight, the pale tones over the nose and forward fuselage of this Bf 109 G-2 of III. Gruppe would certainly seem to indicate that this was a distinct possibility.

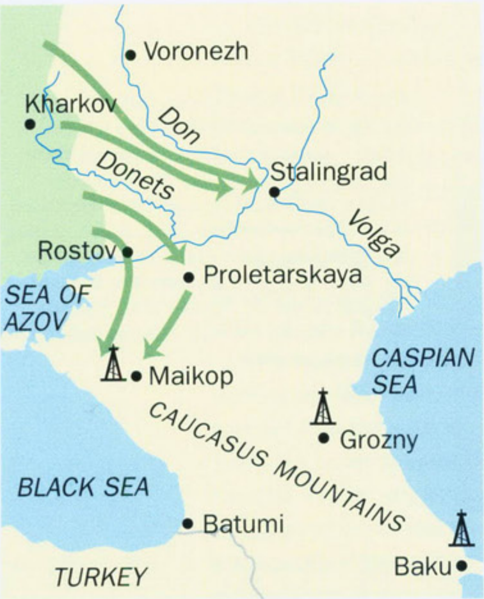


RIGHT: In this view showing, nearest the camera, 'White 10', a Bf 109 G-2 from 7./JG 54, the machine has clearly been camouflaged in a three-tone scheme almost certainly consisting of tan and two greens, whereas the MG 151-armed 'White 7' in the background seems to have been finished only in two, much darker, greens.

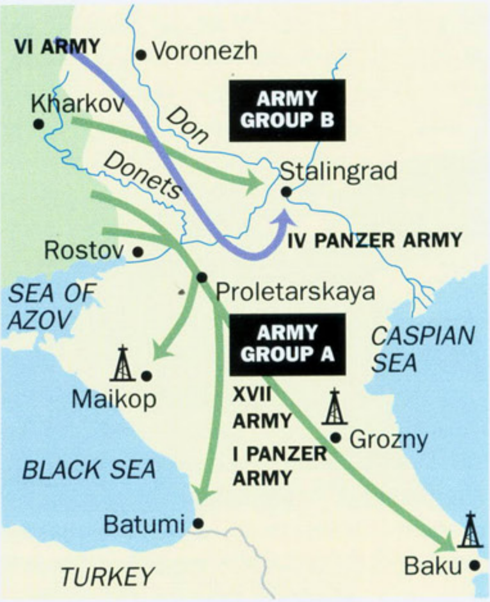


LEFT: In July 1942, III./JG 77 was withdrawn from the Crimea to convert to the Bf 109 G, but due to delays in the delivery of the new machines, conversion was not completed until August when the pilots assembled at Jesau in East Prussia to take delivery of a full complement of brand-new G-2s, some fitted with MG 151 cannon in underwing fairings. On 6 September, III. Gruppe moved from Jesau to Lyuban where it was to assist in the fighting for Leningrad. Here, two pilots of 7. Staffel are seen with a cannon-equipped Bf 109 G-2 in the dark-green camouflage favoured by the Gruppe. On the left is Fw. Heinz Furth, with Ofw. Johann Pichler, later a Ritterkreuzträger, on the right. Note that, as frequently observed, the wolf's head in III. Gruppe emblem on the engine cowling - based on the family coat of arms of the former Kommandeur, Alexander von Winterfeld - appears very light in colour and was probably light brown.

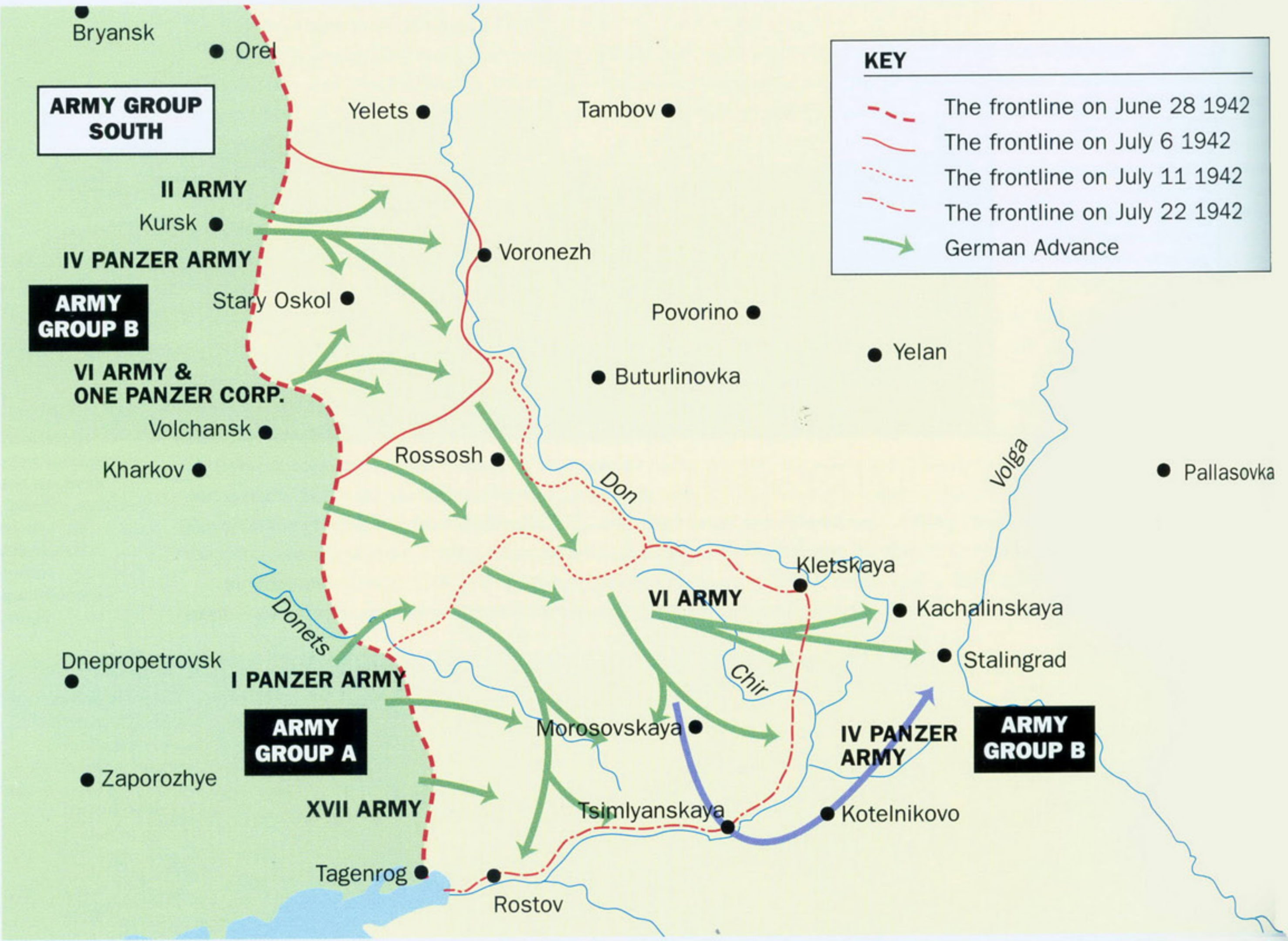
January-October 1942


Voronezh
Kharkov
Don
Donets
Stalingrad
Volga
Rostov
Proletarskaya
SEA OF AZOV
Maikop
CASPIAN SEA
CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS
Grozny
BLACK SEA
Batumi
TURKEY
Baku

LEFT: The original German plan for the Summer of 1942, issued in April, called for armies on the Central sector to stand fast while those in the North captured Leningrad. At the same time, the main operation was to take place in the Southern sector where concentrated forces would break through into the Caucasus intent on seizing the oilfields around Maikop.


VI ARMY
Voronezh
ARMY GROUP B
Kharkov
Don
Donets
Stalingrad
IV PANZER ARMY
Rostov
Proletarskaya
SEA OF AZOV
ARMY GROUP A
CASPIAN SEA
Maikop
XVII ARMY
I PANZER ARMY
Grozny
BLACK SEA
Batumi
TURKEY
Baku

LEFT: In late July, a new directive called for the destruction of Soviet forces south and south-east of Rostov by Army Group A while Army Group B's IV Panzer Corps (blue arrow) was to swing south and then north to Stalingrad.


Bryansk
Orel
ARMY GROUP SOUTH
Yelets
Tambov
KEY
The frontline on June 28 1942
The frontline on July 6 1942
The frontline on July 11 1942
The frontline on July 22 1942
German Advance
II ARMY
Kursk
IV PANZER ARMY
Voronezh
ARMY GROUP B
Stary Oskol
Povorino
Yelan
VI ARMY &
ONE PANZER CORP.
Buturlinovka
Volchansk
Kharkov
Rossosh
Don
Volga
Pallasovka
Kletskaya
VI ARMY
Kachalinskaya
Donets
Stalingrad
Dnepropetrovsk
I PANZER ARMY
Chir
ARMY GROUP A
Morosovskaya
IV PANZER ARMY
ARMY GROUP B
Zaporozhye
XVII ARMY
Tsimlyanskaya
Kotelnikovo
Tagenrog
Rostov

ABOVE: The offensive began well but stalled because of the scope of the plan and because Hitler repeately changed his objectives. The removal of IV Panzer Corps from VI Army slowed the progress of forces advancing towards Stalingrad and, when it was moved north again, Army Group A was weakened and unable to reach its objectives on the southern front.

The Turn of the Tide

Despite the German fighter pilots' impressive victories, it was obvious that the VVS remained unbeaten and, in fact, was continuing to gain in strength. Nowhere was this tendency more clear than in the Far North.

By the beginning of the unusually hot and dry Polar Summer of 1942, *Luftflotte* 5 had been considerably reinforced, and on 1 July 1942 possessed a total of approximately 250 serviceable aircraft. Operationally, these were controlled by *Fliegerführer Nord-Ost, Obstlt.* Walter Lehwess-Litzmann, and by *Fliegerführer* Lofoten, *Oberst* Ernst-August Roth, the former responsible for operations over the front-line and the latter mainly for anti-shipping operations. At first, due to the dominance established by II. and III./JG 5 in the Spring, *Luftflotte* 5 enjoyed a numerical and considerable qualitative superiority, for the opposition amounted only to 173 serviceable Soviet aircraft. Moreover, *Fliegerführer Nord-Ost* benefited from a *Freya* early-warning radar station.

During the Summer, however, this situation began to change, mainly due to the Soviets' ability to bring in new forces. However, one of the new units to arrive was 20 IAP/VVS SF equipped with the first Yak-1s to appear in the Far North and the first Soviet type which could compete effectively with the Bf 109 F. 20 IAP mounted its first operation on 19 July when, together with 2 GSAP, 19 GIAP and 769 IAP, it took off to attack seven Ju 87s and five Ju 88s, escorted by 12 Bf 109s from II. and III./JG 5, which were dispatched to attack Murmansk. Once intercepted, the Bf 109s immediately split up and engaged the Soviet fighters, allowing the bombers to slip away unscathed. In the following fighter versus fighter battle, 7./JG 5's *Lt.* Bodo Helms and *Ofw.* Franz Dörr claimed one Yak -1 each, and *Uffz.* Werner Schumacher claimed two Soviet fighters shot down. Actual Soviet losses amounted to five aircraft: a MiG-3 of 2 GSAP, three aircraft from 19 GIAP, equipped with Airacobras and Kittyhawks, and a 769 IAP Hurricane. In return, 6./JG 5's *Fw.* Leopold Knier was shot down by 20 IAP's *Kapitan* Krylov, while *Uffz.* Hans Döbrich, credited with 14 victories, was shot down by *Lt.* Yevgeniy Petrenko and *Krasnoflotets* Vladimir Burmatov of the same regiment. Both German pilots baled out. Knier was seized by Soviet troops, while Döbrich - who landed 12 miles east of Murmashi - was able to evade capture and walked back to his own lines.

The ability of pilots to return to their unit after trekking through the dry Karelian wilds was, in fact, quite common. On 22 July, the *Gruppenkommandeur* of II./JG 5, *Hptm.* Horst Carganico, was obliged to start walking after his Bf 109 F-4, W.Nr. 10256, developed engine trouble and he crash-landed near Zimnaya Motovka. His aircraft was recovered by the Soviets but Carganico evaded capture and succeeded in returning to the Finnish-German front-line on 25 July.

In total, *Luftflotte* 5 recorded 26 combat losses in July 1942, while VVS SF registered 32 of its own aircraft shot down or missing.

In early August, the fighting in the Far North moved southwards as a *Waffen-SS* unit attempted to capture an area in the hills in the Kestenga-Loukhi sector, south of Kandalaksha Bay and more than 200 miles south of Murmansk. The Soviet air force in this area, VVS 26th Army, had experienced a prolonged period of calm, but the first engagement between the *Luftwaffe* and VVS 26th Army in August 1942 was a good indication that the Germans would meet stiff opposition in this sector. On 2 August, two Bf 109s of 4./JG 5 escorted an Hs 126 of 1.(*H*)/32 which set out on a reconnaissance mission over the lines near Kestenga, but they were intercepted by Hurricanes from 760 IAP/VVS 26th Army. The Soviet fighter pilots destroyed all three German aircraft for the loss of one Hurricane.

A few days later, three Bf 109 pilots on a transfer flight to the same area became disorientated and landed in Soviet-occupied territory where they were all captured. One of them was *Uffz.* Werner Schumacher who had claimed at least ten victories and was the highest-scoring pilot of 7./JG 5.

On 12 August, *Hptm.* Horst Carganico's *Schwarm* from *Stab* II./JG 5 was involved in combat with Soviet fighters while escorting an Fw189 over the Litsa Front and Murmansk. The outcome was a single MiG-3 claimed, while a Soviet fighter pilot from 19 GIAP shot down Carganico, who came down behind enemy lines for the second time in only a few weeks. This time, he was rescued by an Fi 156 *Storch* after one day.

On 21 August, pilots from the *Expertenstaffel* 6./JG 5 claimed to have shot down 14 Soviet fighters out of 35 which intercepted the *Zerstörer Staffel* 13.(*Z*)/JG 5. According to Soviet files, 12 Soviet fighters took part in this clash, and two LaGG-3s from 1 AE/255 IAP and two I-16s from 3 AE of 27 IAP/VVS SF were shot down near Vayenga. Another I-16 from 27 IAP/VV SF and one Kittyhawk from 2 GSAP/VVS-SF made forced landings at the airfield. The Germans lost two Bf 109s, one of which was flown by the new *Staffelkapitän* of 6./JG 5, *Oblt.* Hans Dieter Hartwein, victor of 16 combats, who was posted missing. Furthermore, 'Rudi' Müller returned with a hole through the canopy of his Bf 109 where a bullet had missed his head by only a few inches.

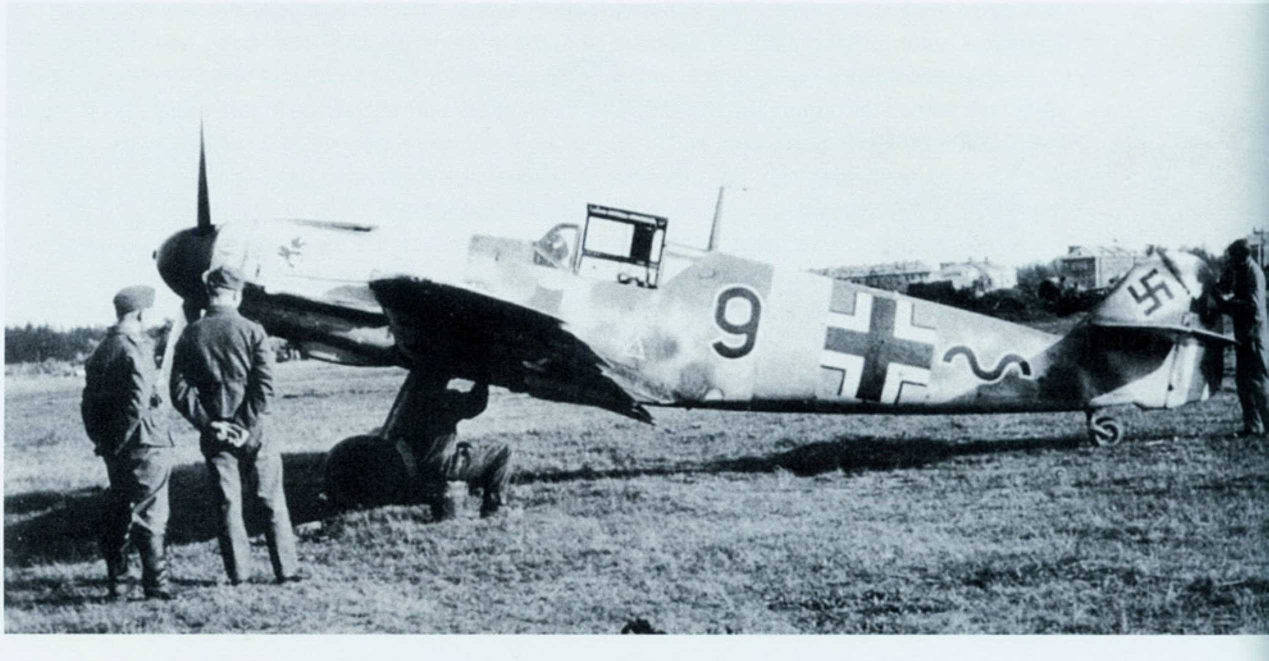
During this period, overclaims were made by both sides, and it is indicative of the character of fighter pilots in general that both Germans and Soviets felt that they each enjoyed a convincing superiority. The pilots of JG 5 were certain that they were inflicting crippling losses on the enemy, claiming a total of 72 victories in August, but Soviet statistics show only 24 Soviet aircraft lost with another seven damaged and 13 aircraft missing. Another four were shot down by ground fire.

Contrary to the general assessment of the air war on the Eastern Front, Soviet fighter pilots in the Murmansk area were more successful against the Bf 109 at this time than RAF Fighter Command. According to the loss statistics of both sides, in 1942, Fighter Command lost on average of 3.5 aircraft for every German fighter destroyed in combat over Western Europe, and in North Africa the ratio was even higher. In comparison, and including aircraft shot down by Finnish fighters, the Soviets lost 34 fighters and the Germans ten in the Karelia - Murmansk area during the same period, a ratio of 3.4 Soviet aircraft destroyed to each one lost. However, discounting the Finnish pilots' successes, Soviet losses due only to action by *Luftflotte* 5 amounted to no more than six fighters, indicating that the Germans were losing approximately two of their own fighters for every Soviet one destroyed. From the Autumn of 1942, the initiative in the air in the Far North slipped gradually and irreversibly further in favour of the Soviets.

Summary

Some of the numerical successes attained by German fighter pilots in 1942, particularly during the Summer, were unparalleled, surpassing even the astronomical achievements of the previous year. Before the German 1942 Summer offensive opened on the Eastern Front, 11 *Luftwaffe* fighter pilots had each surpassed the 100-victory mark, but between July and October 1942, another 18 pilots in the East achieved the same feat. Moreover, in August 1942, JG 52's *Geschwaderkommodore*, *Major* Gordon Gollob, became the first pilot to achieve 150 victories, and the next month *Hptm.* Hermann Graf of 9./JG 52 exceeded 200. The important contribution of the *Jagdwaffe* is evident, too, in the comparatively low losses in the *Kampf-* and *Stukagruppen* which in turn allowed these units to provide air support vital to the survival of the *Wehrmacht's* ground forces.

Between January and October 1942, the *Luftwaffe* claimed to have shot down in aerial combat more than 12,000 Soviet aircraft. Although Soviet sources indicate that this amounts to an overclaim rate of 2:1, it still represents a tremendous achievement, and yet the VVS forced the *Jagdwaffe* to fight bitterly and many *Experten* lost their lives or were captured. Three of these had exceeded 100 victories;



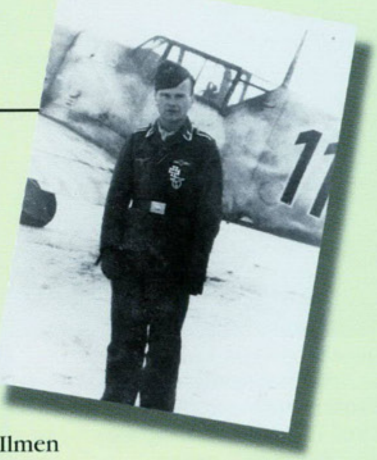
RIGHT:
'Black 9' of 8./JG 52 showing the large fuselage mottles which appeared on a number of this unit's aircraft. The position of the yellow fuselage band ahead of the Balkenkreuz was favoured by this Staffel.

Lt. Franz-Josef Beerenbrock (117 victories, PoW), *Oblt.* Max-Hellmuth Ostermann (102 victories, killed) and *Oblt.* Viktor Bauer (106 victories, severely injured). All three were shot down by Soviet fighter pilots. It is noteworthy that in August 1942, JG 51 – the Luftwaffe's most successful *Jagdgeschwader* by that time – suffered heavier losses than ever previously in the war. And in the Far North, JG 5 lost its air superiority in the Autumn of 1942.

True, in 1942, the *Jagdwaffe* had succeeded in achieving what it had been unable to do in 1941 – namely to break the famous Soviet stamina. However, the Soviets' ability to revive remained unaffected and Stalingrad, the scene of the VVS's most humiliating defeat, would also witness its most dramatic revival.

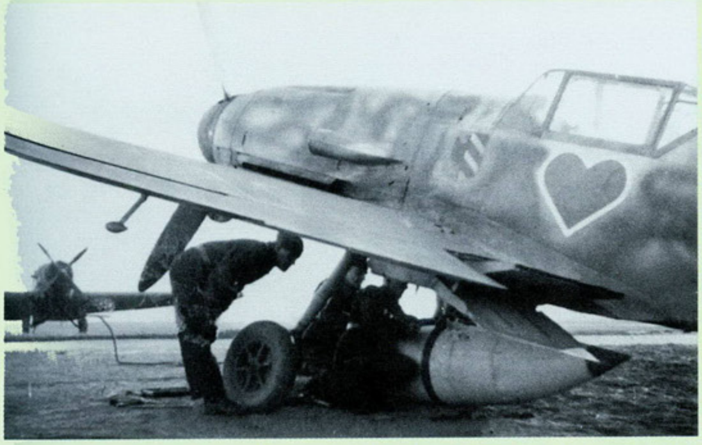
"I heard the sound of a collision..."

PETER BREMER, JG 54



In the Autumn of 1941 we advanced rapidly and hoped for an early and successful conclusion to the war. We were then about 35 km from Leningrad, the front lines had stabilised and we were stationed at a permanent air base. We had fewer engagements with the enemy as the Russians realised that they were technically inferior, but we heard about the huge number of kills being scored on the Central and Southern Sectors of the front. The Winter of 1941/42 was very severe for the *Wehrmacht*, but our permanent air base near Lake Ladoga had a concrete runway and this allowed the unit to remain operational. Our mission was to keep the skies clear of the enemy and we kept a lane on the runway clear of snow so that our *Staffel* could take off. We had already practised dropping concrete bombs at Jever, so from time to time we carried live 250 kg bombs under the fuselage, but to extend our time in the air the bomb rack was replaced with an auxiliary drop tank.

For one mission, we were to fly in a *Rotte* of two aircraft and carry out a fighter sweep between Lakes Ilmen and Ladoga. I was the leader and both aircraft carried drop tanks. It had snowed, but the runway had been cleared. Normally, the Me 109 had some difficulties during take-off and on this occasion, as I took off, my aircraft swerved and I knew that the results would not be good as I was heading for the snow bank on the side of the runway. I attempted to lift the aircraft clear and almost made it, but I heard the sound of a collision and realised that part of the aircraft had hit something. I quickly pressed the button to retract the landing gear but, although I was airborne, I realised the aircraft was not accelerating. I informed my wingman that I could not gain speed and asked him to look my aircraft over to determine the damage. He told me that the auxiliary fuel tank was perpendicular to the direction of flight. I couldn't go any faster than 300-350 km/h. The solution would be to jettison the tank, and this is what ground control told me to do as the *Kommodore* had observed the incident.

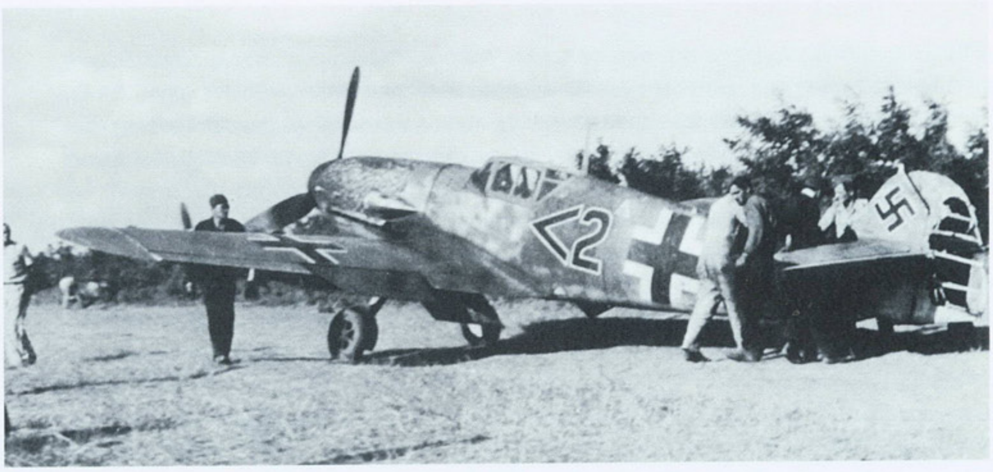


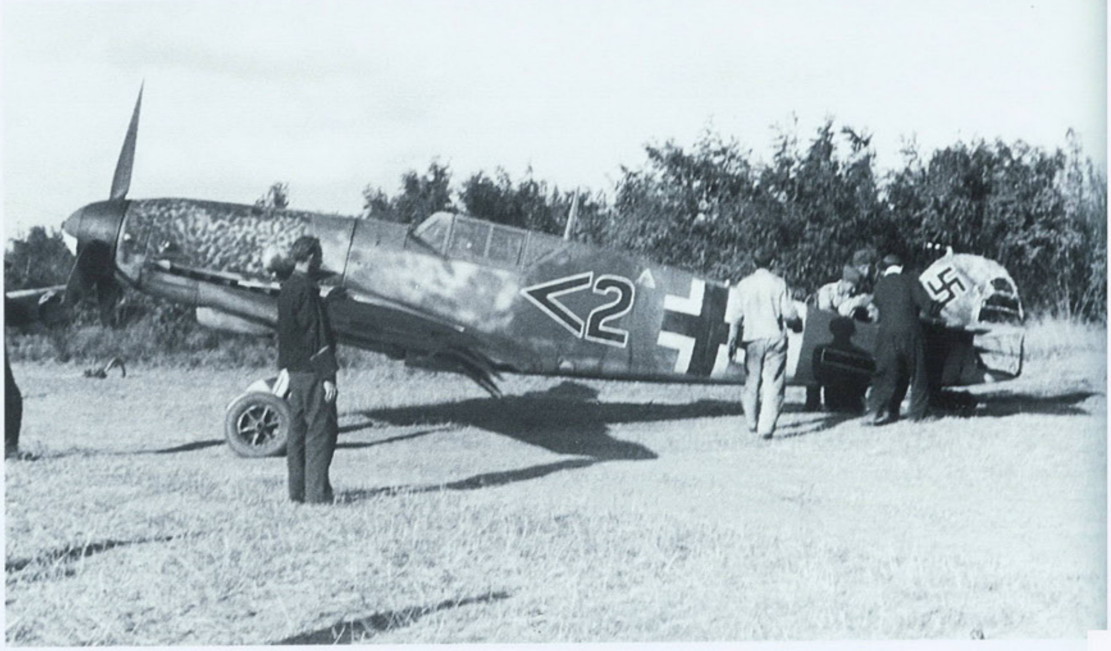
Bf 109F of I./JG 54 with drop tank attached.

I slowly climbed to between 4,000 and 5,000 metres and came down in a dive in an attempt to jettison the tank but it refused to separate because the release mechanism had been damaged. Ground control ordered me to fly away from the airfield and bale out, but I thought to myself that I could not destroy this beautiful aircraft. Instead, I thought I would try to land the machine on the tank and on its belly, not on the concrete runway, but to one side where the fields were covered in deep snow. The fire engine and the ambulance were standing by as I approached the base very slowly, at about 200 km/h. Once over the base, I cut the ignition and the engine stopped. I carefully lowered the aircraft until it made contact with the ground and it slid to a stop. The fuel tank had ruptured when the weight of the aircraft crushed it, but there was no fire. I climbed out of the cockpit and stood on the wing. The only damage was a bent propeller blade. Once the propeller was replaced, the aircraft was serviceable again.

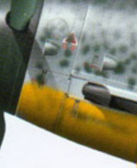
In the Winter of 1942, we converted to the Fw 190 which we collected at Elbing, near Königsberg. Because it existed only in a single-seat version, the only tuition we received was carried out on the ground. Afterwards, we could fly the aircraft for up to ten hours in order to familiarise ourselves with its flight characteristics. It had a very wide landing gear and was more pleasant to fly and easier to land and take off than the Me 109.

Shortly before Christmas time, we planned to fly our Fw 190s from Elbing to the Leningrad area. The weather was bad practically every day, and we had flown as far as Riga when the *Staffelkapitän* told us we could call our wives or girl friends. I went on leave and was married on 23 December. The next day the weather was clear and we took off to continue our journey.





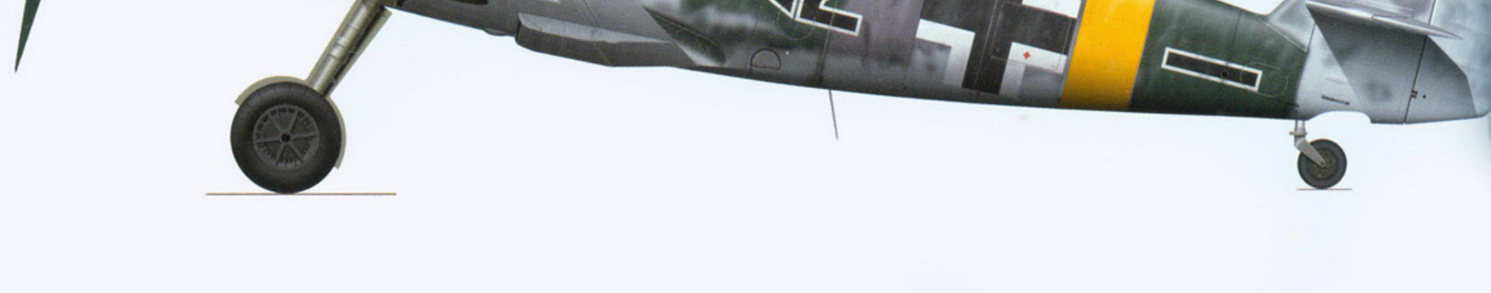
ABOVE AND RIGHT:
This damaged Bf 109 G-2 was flown by Uffz. Hans Waldmann, who flew his first combat mission with Stab II./JG 52 on 31 August 1942 and was wingman to Hptm. Steinhoff, the Gruppenkommandeur. Waldmann claimed his first two victories on the 2nd and 3 November 1942 and subsequently became very successful as a fighter pilot, later flying with 6./JG 52 before transferring to the West. He claimed a total of 134 victories, including two with the Me 262, and was decorated with the Oak Leaves in March 1945. These photographs show Waldmann's aircraft, W.Nr. 13566, in September 1942 after Soviet anti-aircraft fire damaged his rudder.

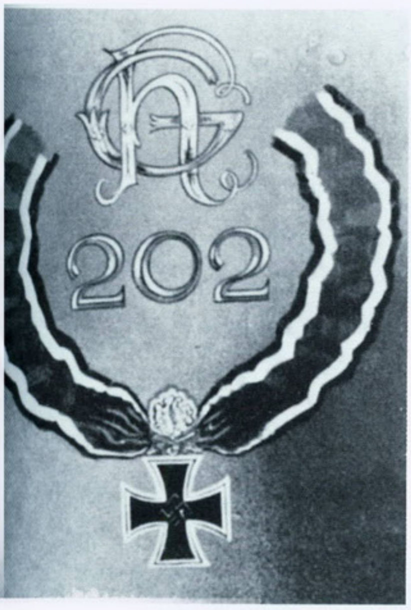


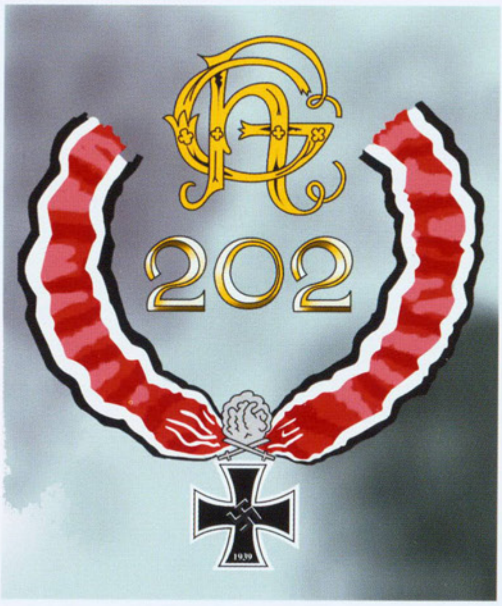
Spinner detail

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 'Chevron 2' flown by Uffz. Hans Waldmann of Stab II./JG 52, August 1942

Originally finished in a standard 02/74/75/76 factory scheme with a completely yellow nose, this aircraft had repainted areas where earlier markings had been modified. In particular, the nose has been camouflaged in a tight, sprayed speckle which clearly does not match the fuselage mottling, while the fuselage shows that the Stab chevron and numeral '2' on the fuselage have been applied over a patch of RLM 74 where earlier markings have been painted out. Similarly, the rear fuselage markings have also been modified with RLM 74, perhaps to narrow a wider yellow fuselage band or to overpaint an earlier Gruppe marking.

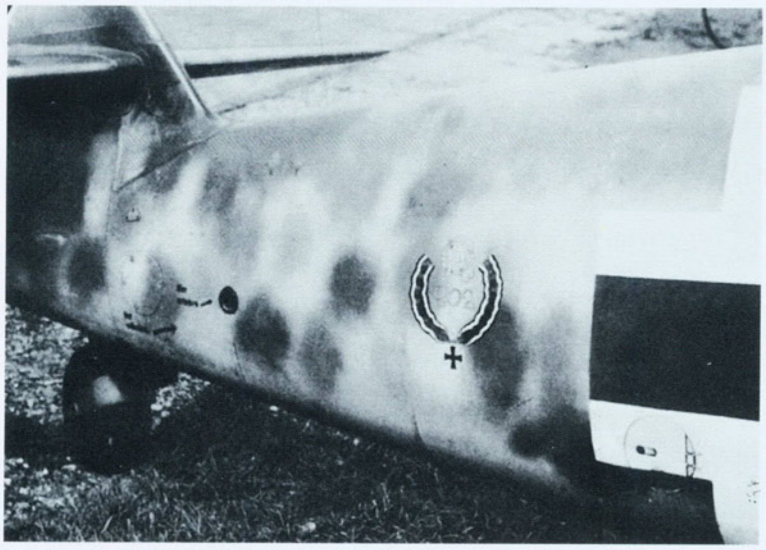






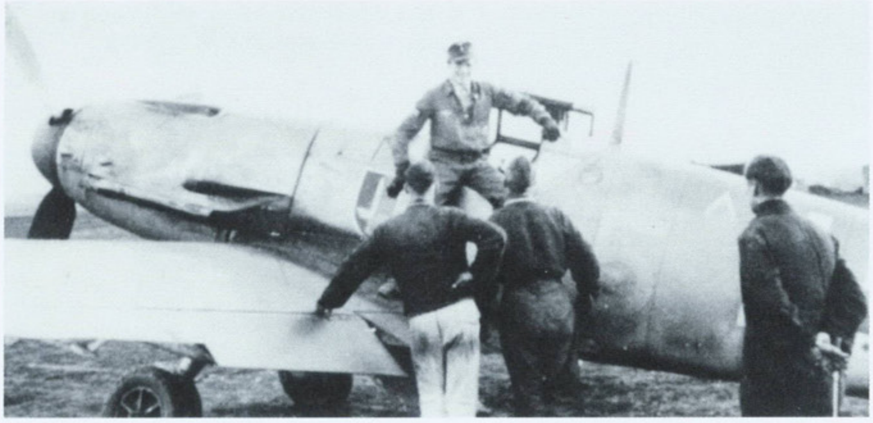
Colour detail of fuselage decoration on Hptm. Hermann Graf's Bf 109 G-2.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: On 26 September 1942, Hptm.Hermann Graf, the Staffelkapitän of 9./JG 52, became the first pilot to exceed 200 victories. Unusually, the fuselage instead of the rudder was later selected as the location for the artistic device which commemorated his achievement.



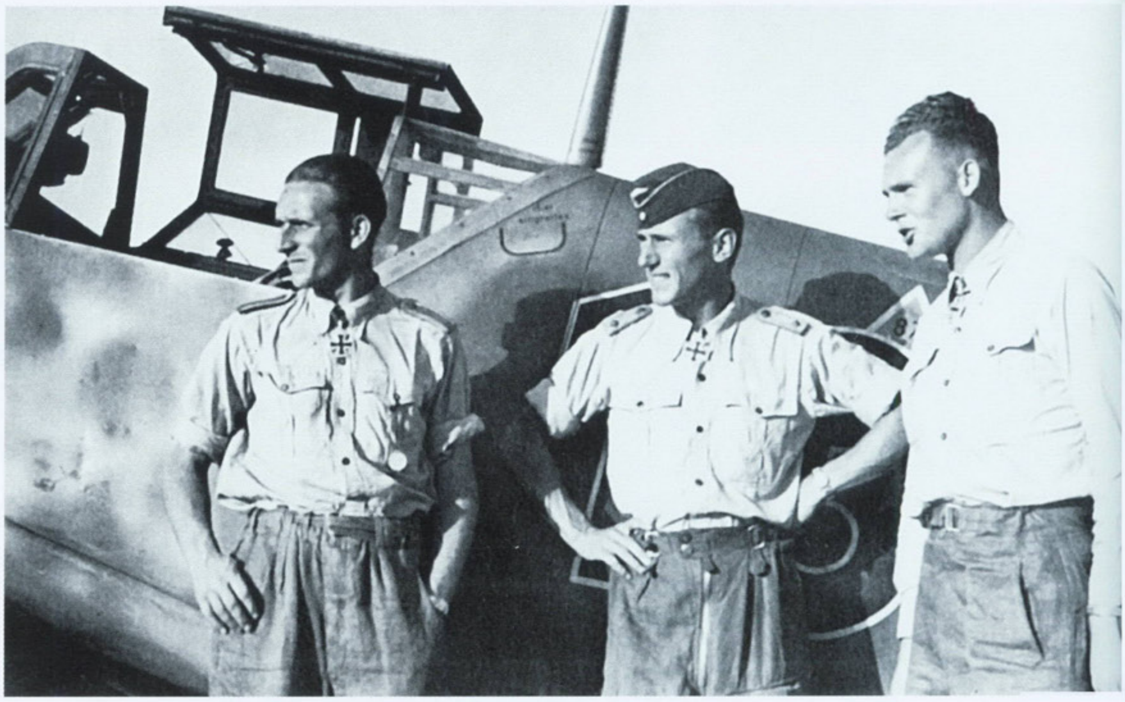
ABOVE: Hermann Graf shown here as a Major wearing the Diamonds awarded on 16 September 1942 when he was an Oberleutnant.

BELOW AND BELOW LEFT: Graf is seen here in Germany (*BELOW*) receiving congratulations and (*BELOW LEFT*) signing the Golden Book of Flyers in which were entered the names and signatures of the Luftwaffe's top aces.

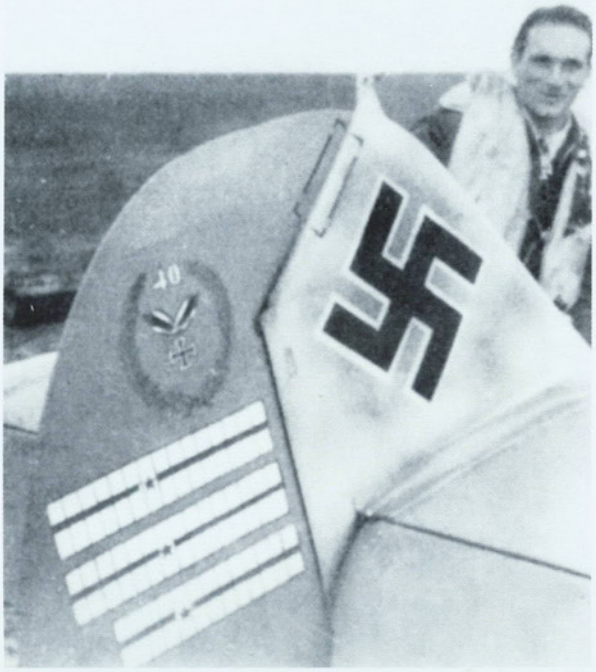


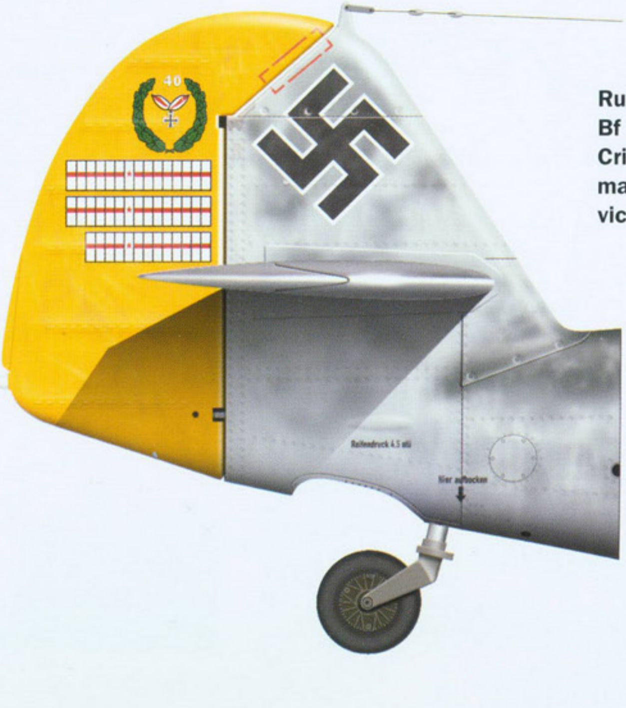
BELOW: Three Ritterkreuzträger of 8./JG 52. From the left, Uffz. Karl Gratz (awarded RK on 1 July 1942), Oblt. Günther Rall (RK 3 September 1942) and Fw. Hans Dammers (RK 23 August 1942). The aircraft in the background is Rall's 'Black 13' which was finished in a standard 02/74/75/76 scheme, had a black III. Gruppe wavy bar symbol outlined in white superimposed upon a yellow fuselage band aft of the fuselage cross, and carried the Gruppe's barbed red cross badge on the fuselage, forward of the windscreen.

ABOVE: Lt. Walter Krupinski of 6./JG 52 with a Bf 109 G-2 coded 'Brown 5' in October 1942, in which month he was awarded the Ritterkreuz after claiming 53 victories.



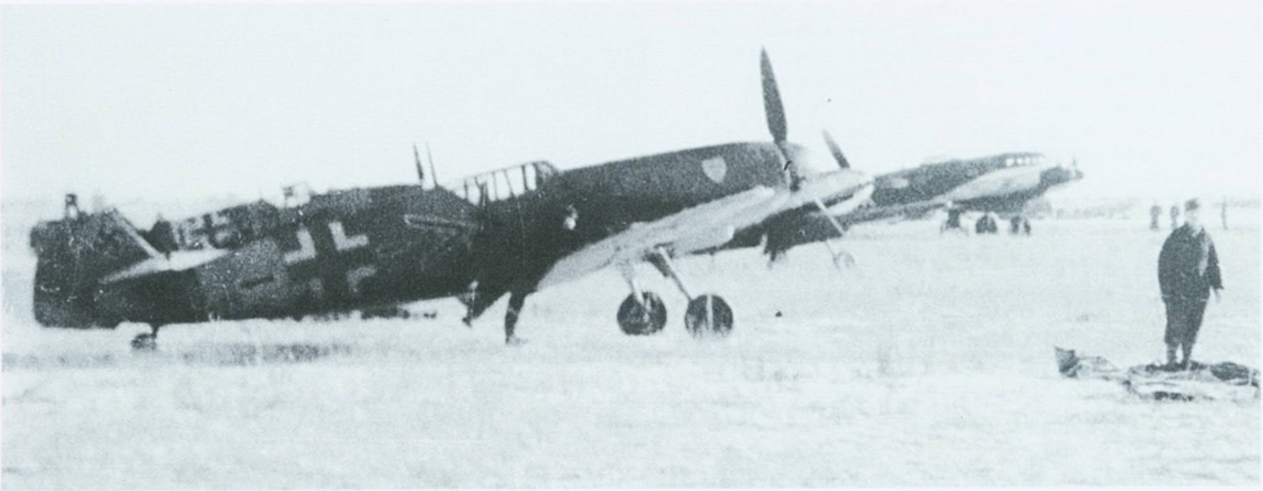
BELOW: Uffz. Karl Gratz of 8./JG 52, photographed in the Crimea in the Autumn of 1942, with the rudder of his Bf 109 G-2 marked with 83 victory bars. The III. Gruppe of JG 52 was one of the first units on the Eastern Front to be fully equipped with the G-2 variant.

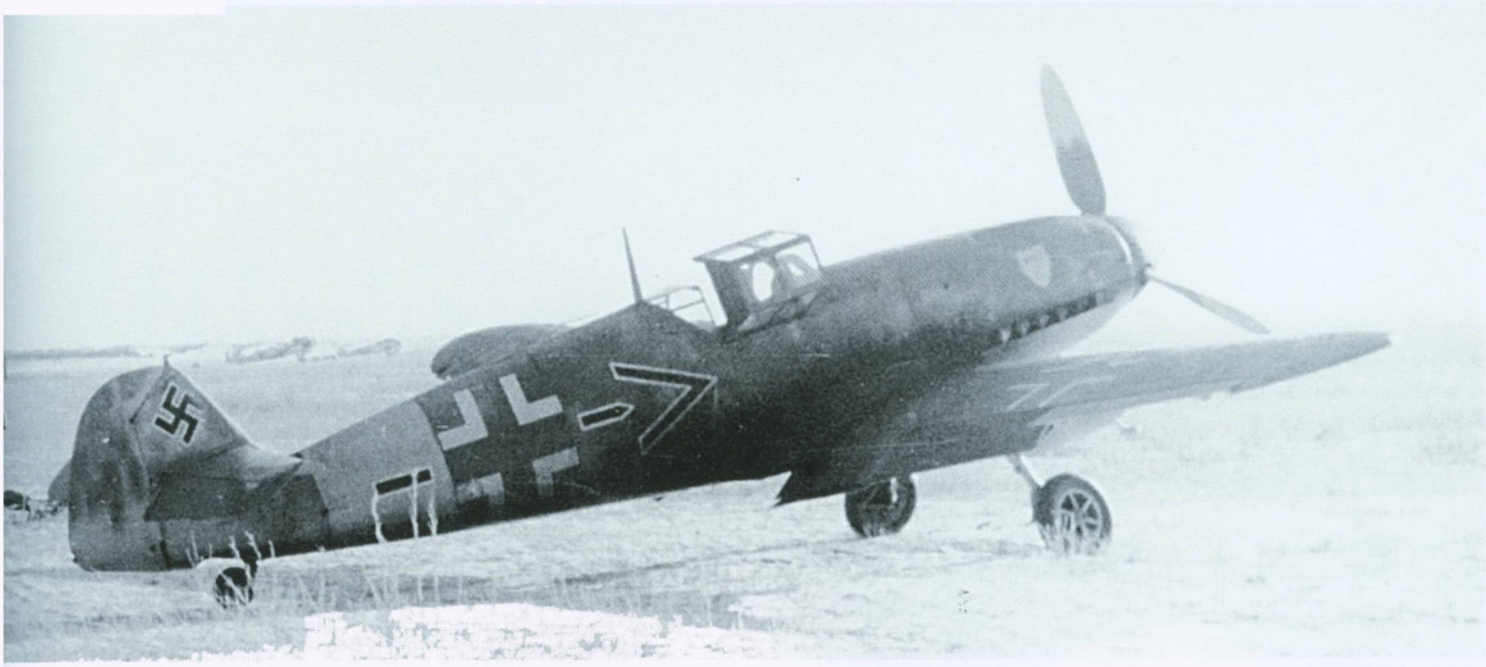


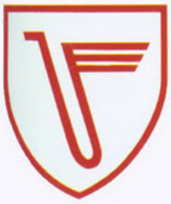


Rudder of Karl Gratz's Bf 109, 8./JG 52, Crimea, Autumn 1942, marked with 83 victories.

RIGHT AND BELOW: In the foreground of these two photographs, taken in September 1942, stand two almost identical Bf 109 G-2 aircraft, one, however, being an R6 equipped with a pair of underwing cannon. Both machines were flown by Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke who, although still having the rank of Hauptmann, was at that time leading JG 3.



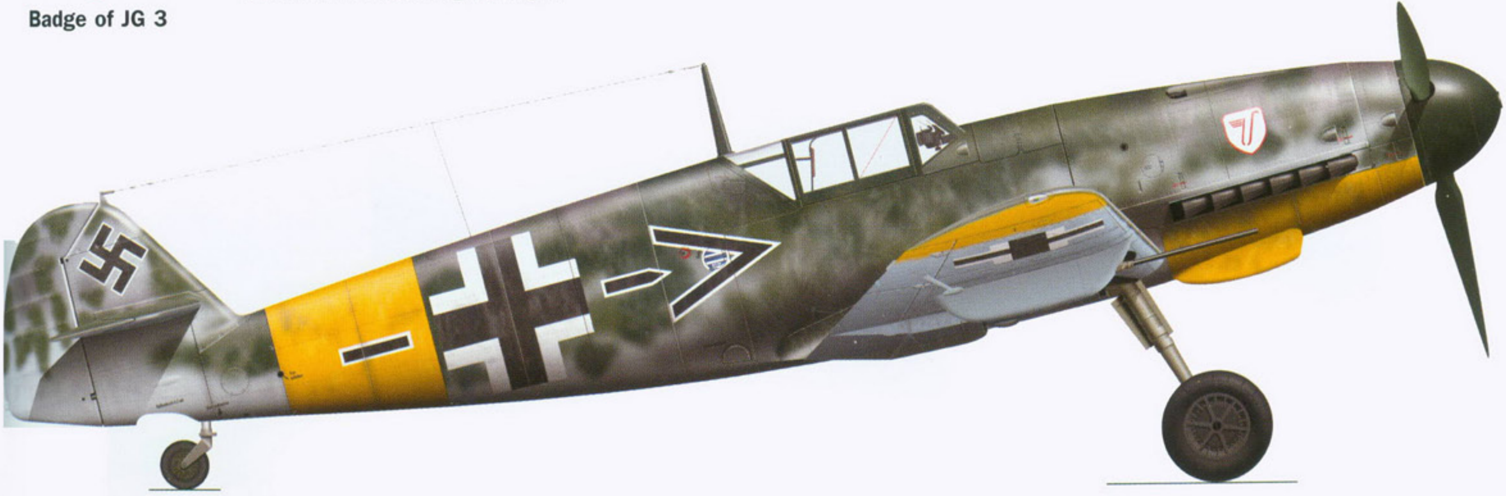




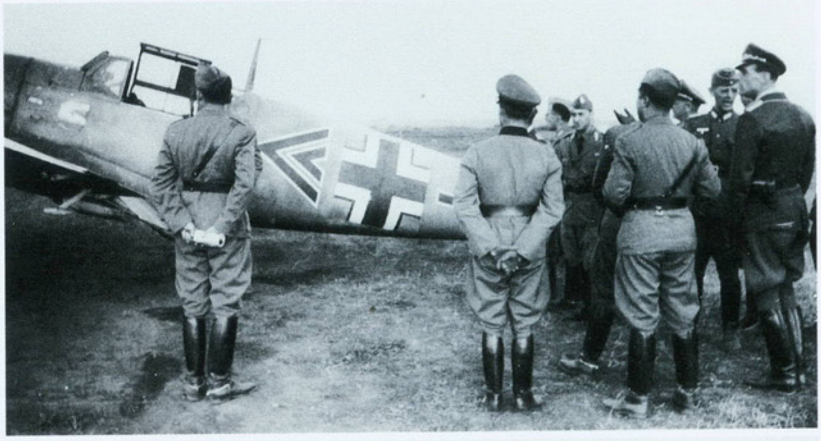
Badge of JG 3

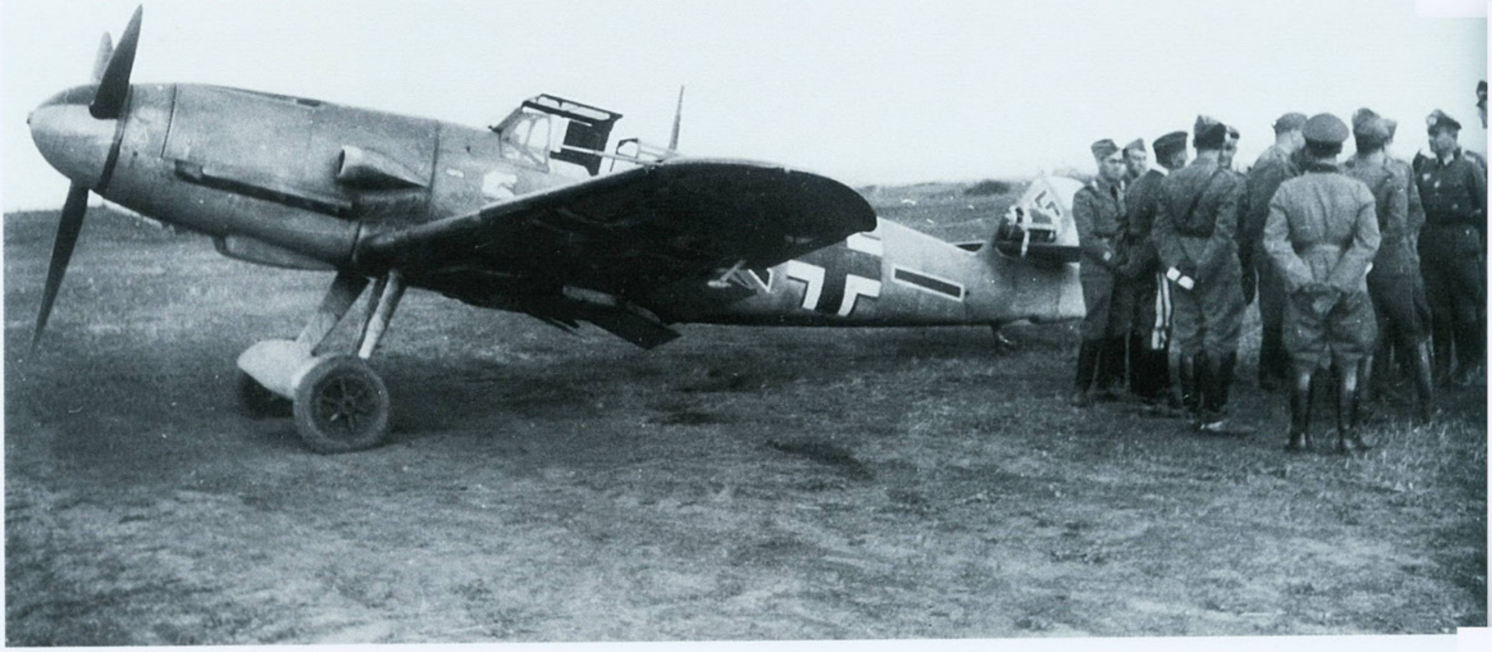
Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 flown by Hptm. Wolf-Dietrich Wilcke, Kommodore of JG 3, September 1942

The camouflage on this machine, shown without its undercarriage fairings, is in the normal RLM colours 74/75/76 with Kommodore's markings added to the fuselage side. With the spinner in plain green RLM 70, the only other adornments are the wide yellow fuselage band, the yellow under the engine cowling and the Geschwader badge of JG 3 on the nose. Note, however, that this aircraft is a Bf 109 G-2/R6 fighter and is armed with two MG 151 cannon in underwing fairings.



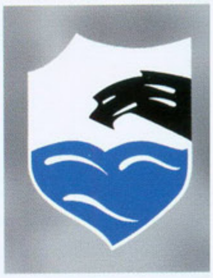
RIGHT AND BELOW: From June 1941 to late February 1943, II./JG 77 was led by Hptm. Anton Mader who received the Deutches Kreuz on 2 January 1942 and the Ritterkreuz on 23 July 1942 after 40 victories. These photographs show Mader's Bf 109 F-4 in September 1942 being examined by Hungarian staff officers.



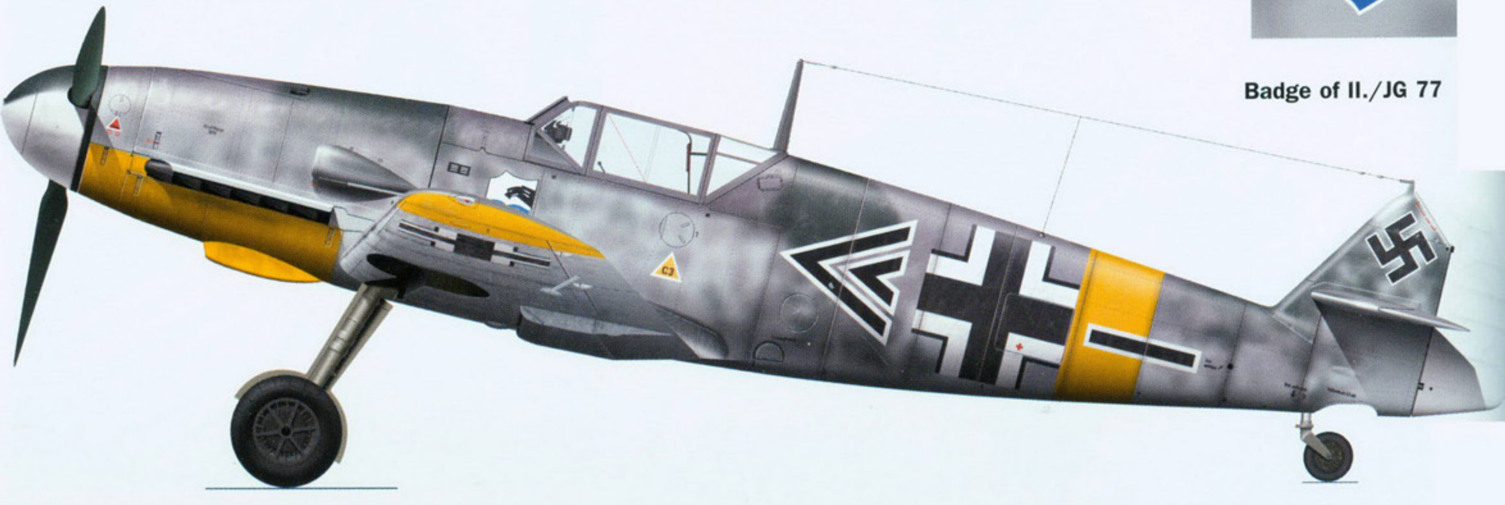


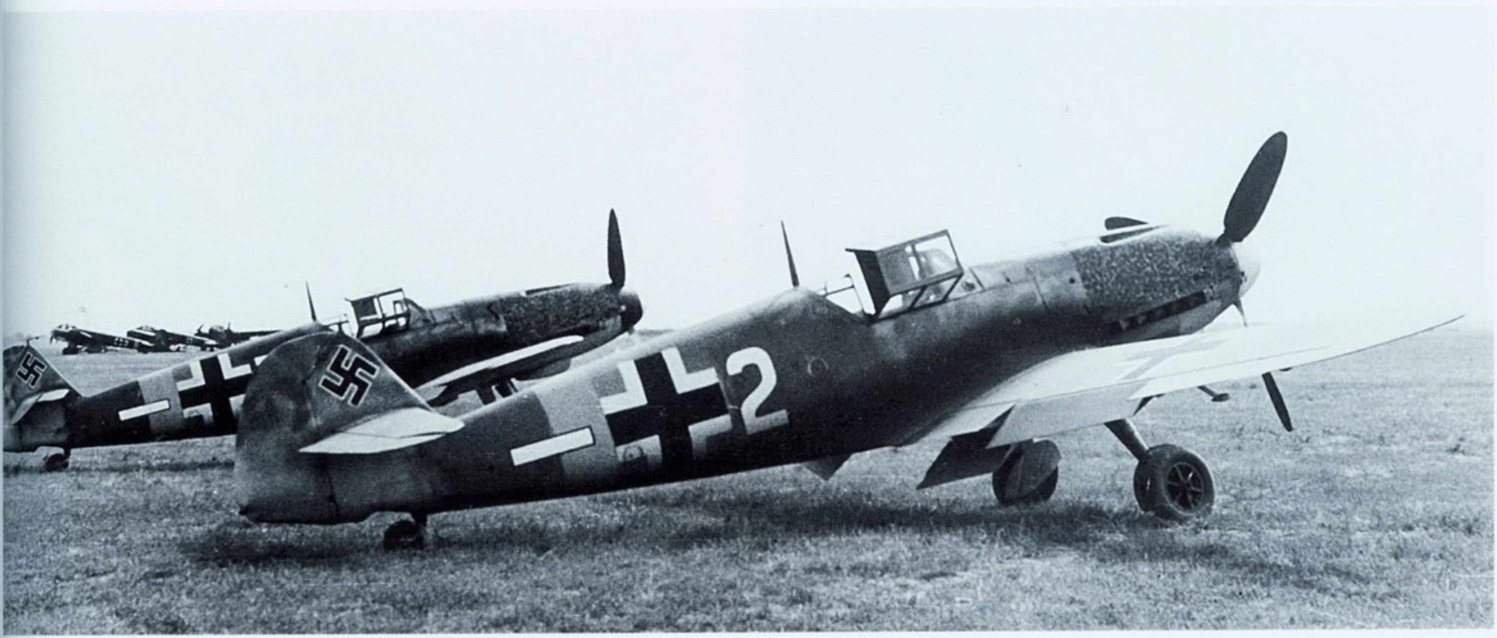
Messerschmitt Bf 109 F-4 flown by Hptm. Anton Mader, Kommandeur of II./JG 77, September 1942

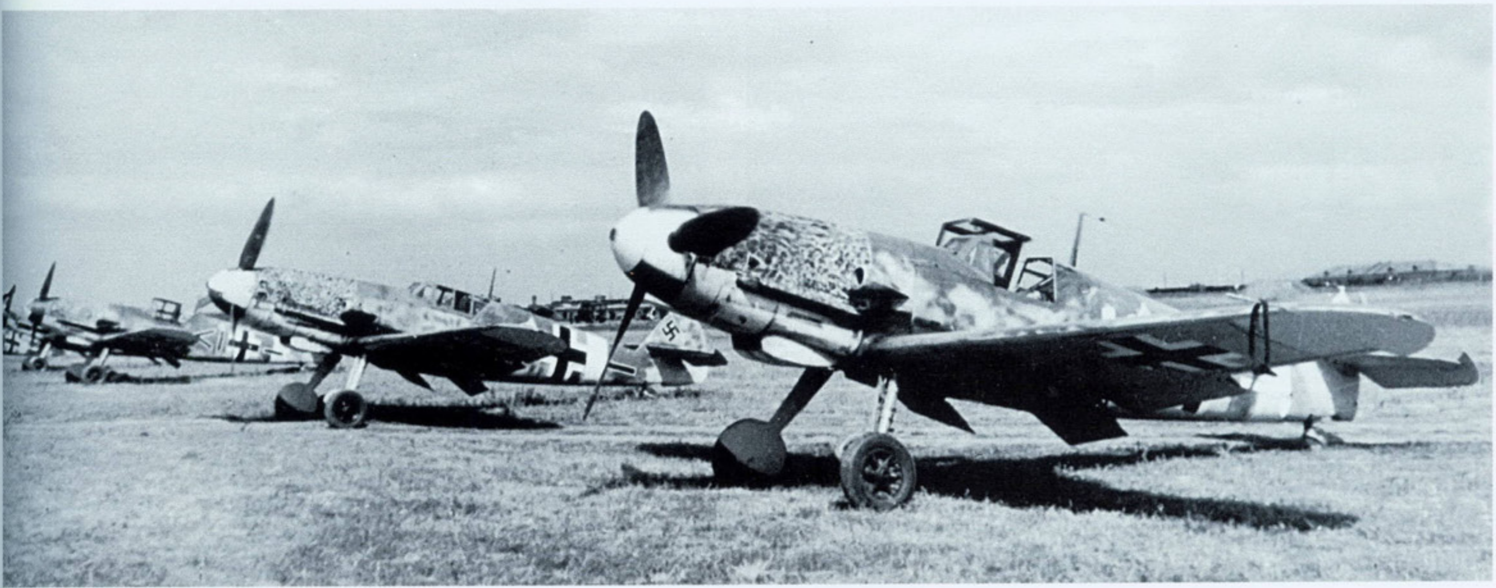
Hptm. Mader's aircraft carried the Gruppe badge below the windscreen and the double chevron of a Gruppenkommandeur ahead of the fuselage Balkenkreuz. The theatre markings consisted of a yellow panel under the engine and a narrow yellow fuselage band on the rear fuselage, while the rudder was plain white with no victory bars. The camouflage colours were RLM 74/75/76 and, to judge from the accompanying photograph, the spinner appears to have been green RLM 70 but with a large gloss white segment.

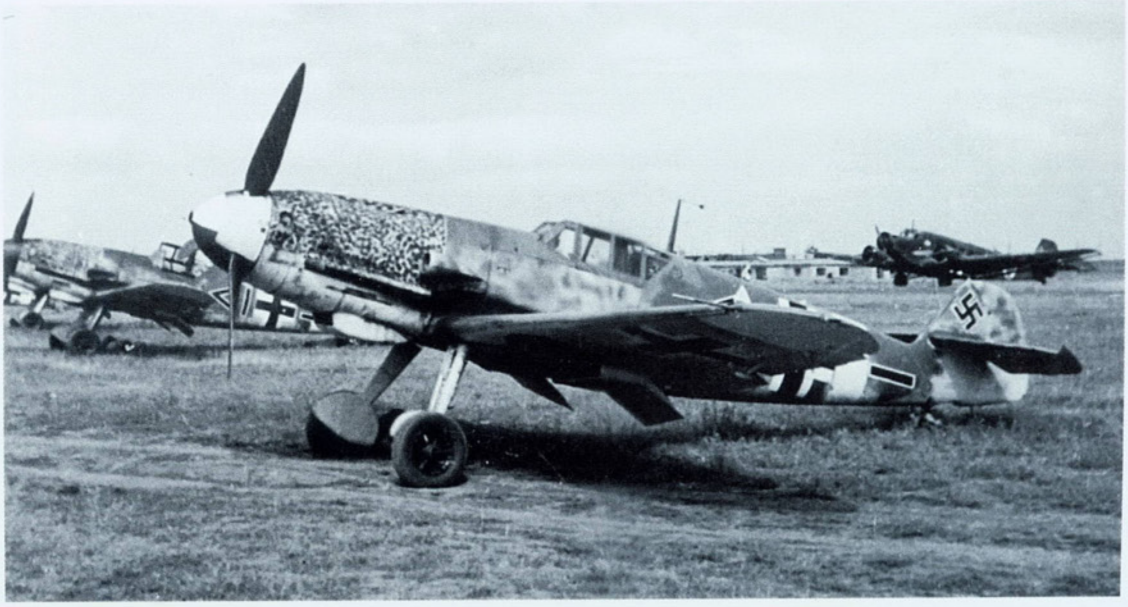


Badge of II./JG 77

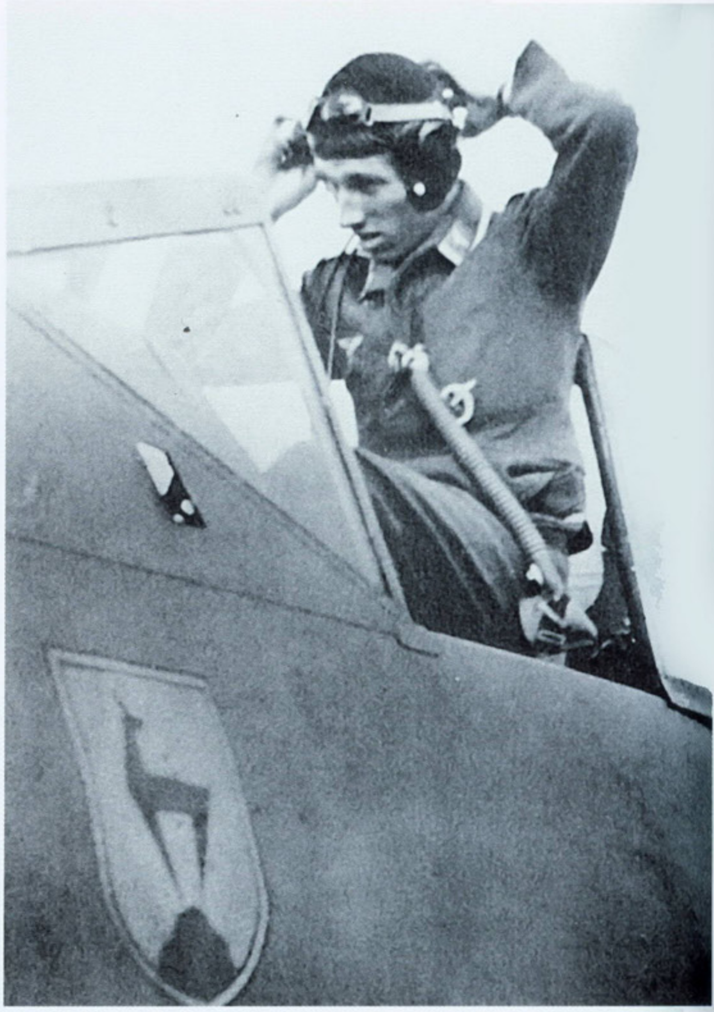




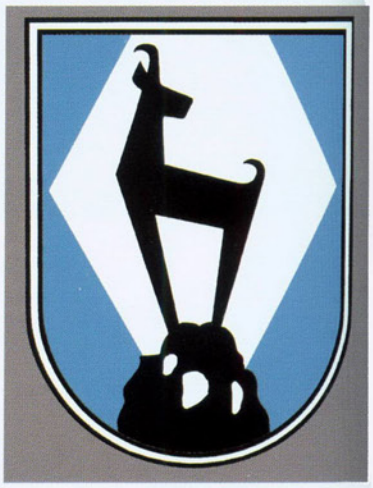




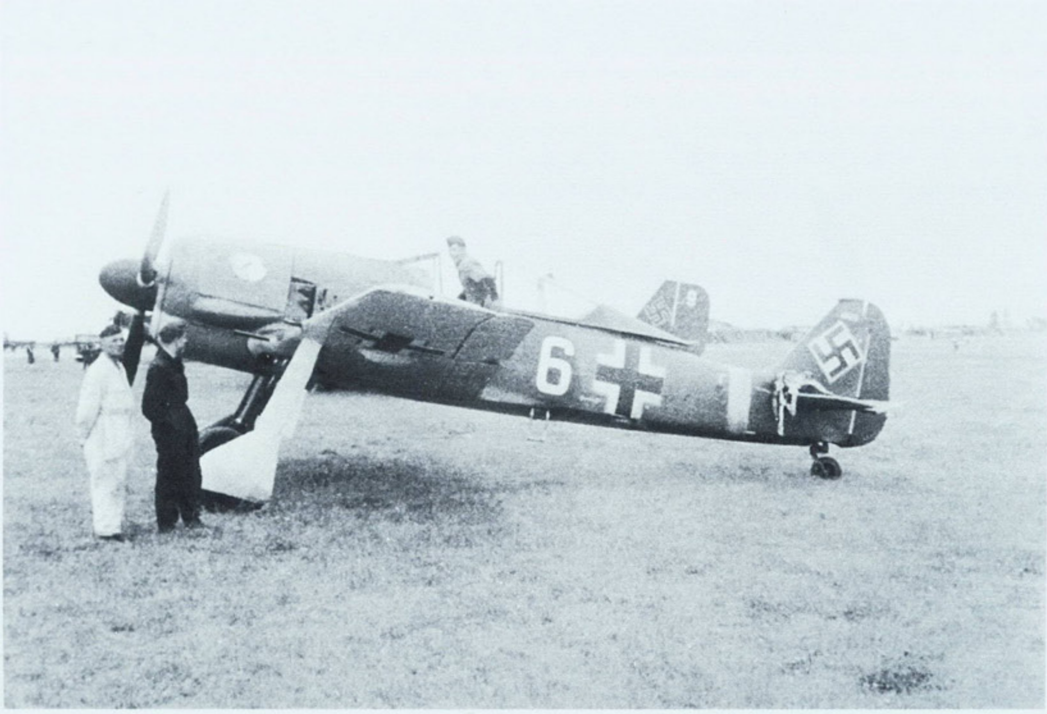
THIS PAGE: Various views of BF 109 G-2s belonging II./JG 52, photographed in the Summer of 1942. All aircraft have mottled cowlings, presumably to tone the earlier yellow finish. This seems to have been a characteristic of this unit's aircraft.



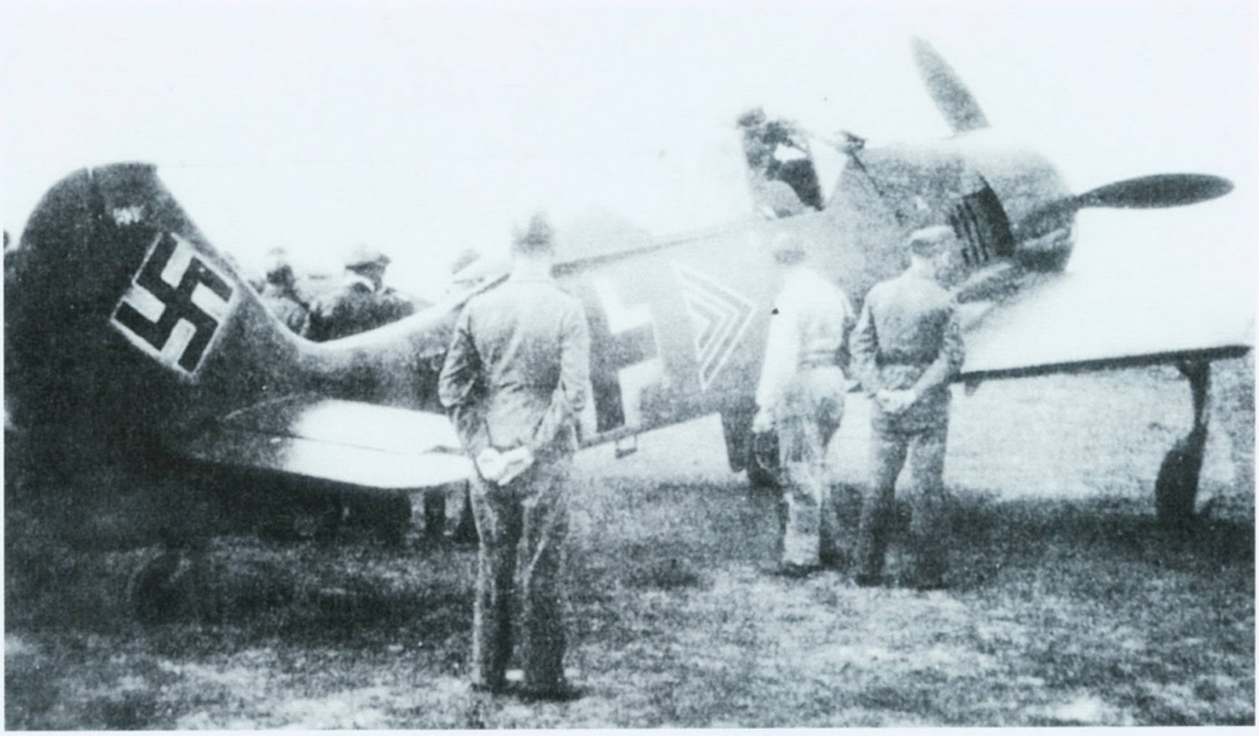
ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: In late August 1942, I./JG 51 was withdrawn to Jesau and re-equipped with the Fw 190, becoming the first fighter unit to operate the type on the Eastern Front. These photographs show Uffz. Oskar Romm, who joined I./JG 51 in September 1942 during the Gruppe's conversion to the Fw 190. Romm claimed the first of his 92 victories on 4 December, was later awarded the Ritterkreuz and, from mid-February 1945 until the final weeks of the war, was an Oberleutnant in command of IV./JG 3.



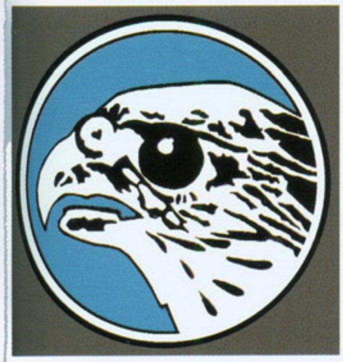
Badge of I./JG 51



LEFT: This Fw 190 A-3, 'White 6', also of I./JG 51, has been fitted with MG/FF cannon in the outer wings. Note again the light background surrounding the swastika where the normal grey factory finish on the uppersurfaces has been re-sprayed to provide a darker camouflage.



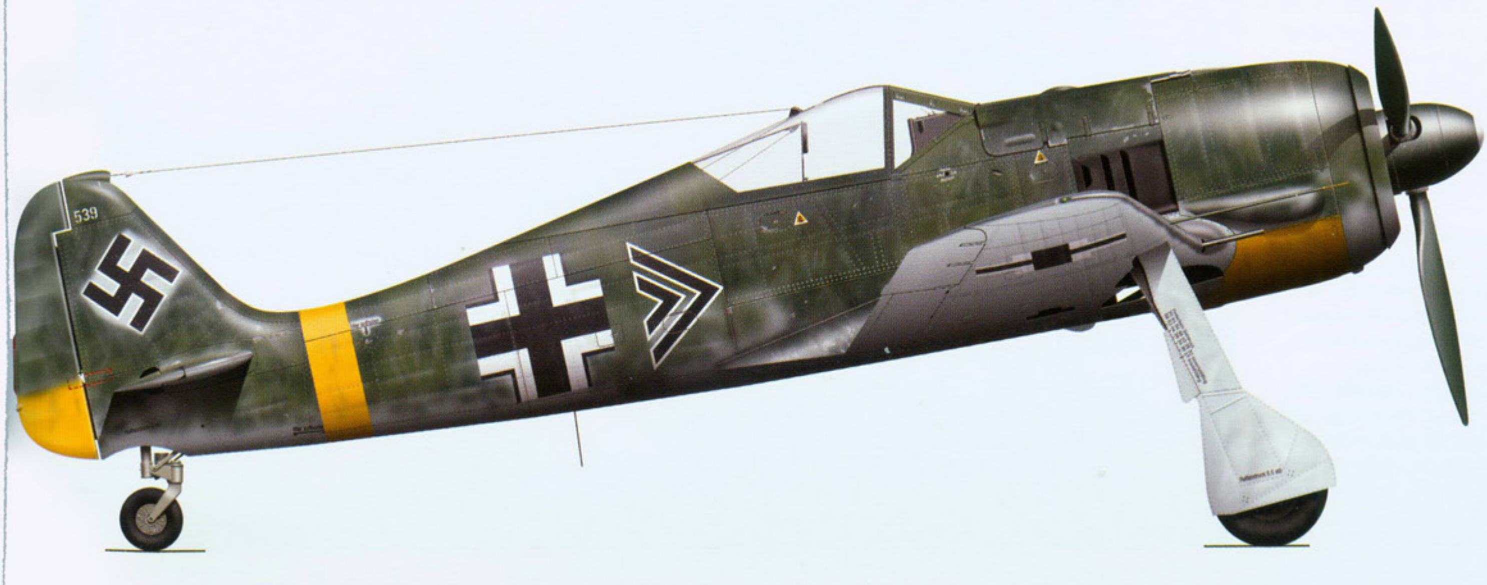
RIGHT: A further photograph showing Hptm. Heinrich Krafft's Fw 190 A-3 after the Gruppe returned to operations at Orel in the Autumn of 1942 after the unit's conversion to the Fw 190. Hptm. Krafft was flying this aircraft on 14 December 1942 when it was hit by Soviet anti-aircraft fire. Krafft was observed baling out and was posted missing but, in fact, it is now known that he landed in enemy territory and was beaten to death by Russian soldiers.



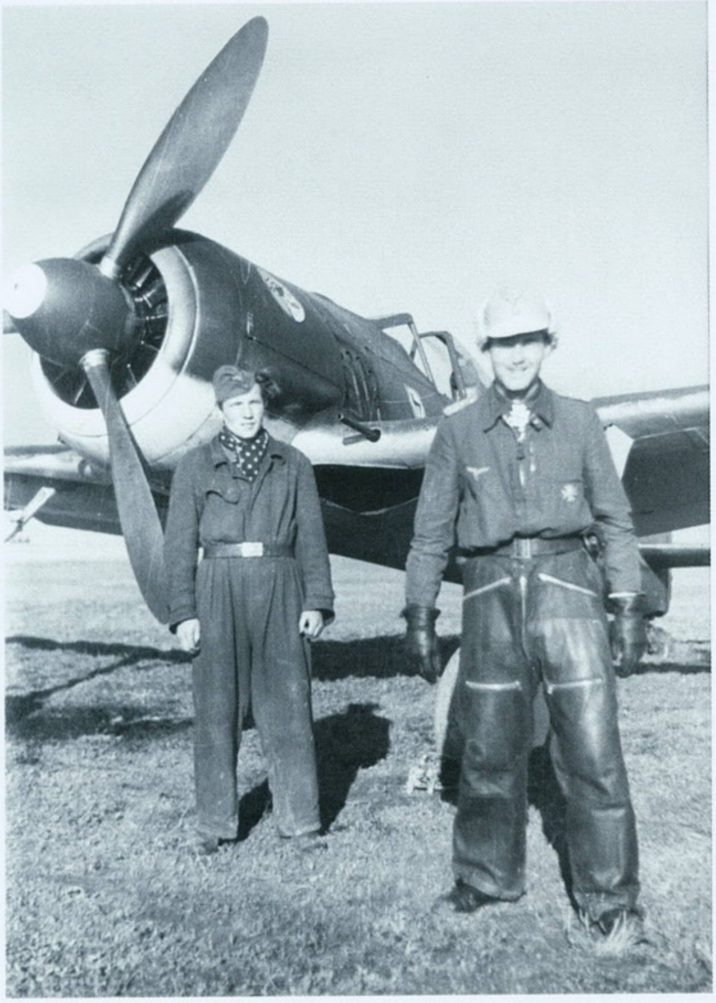
Badge of JG 51

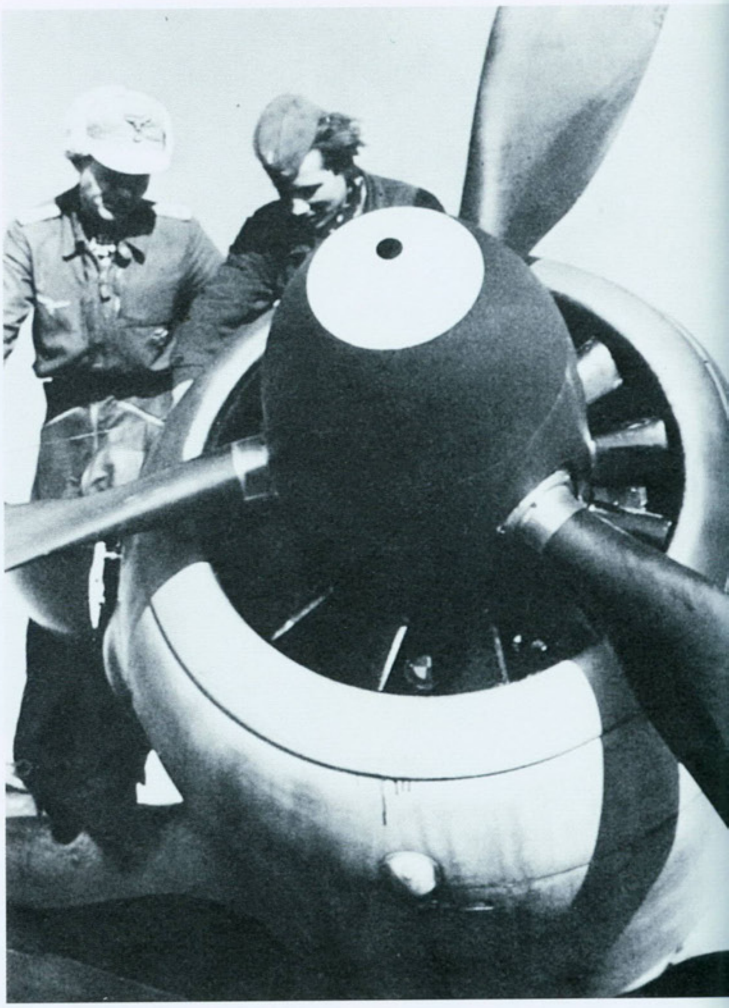
Focke-Wulf Fw 190 A-3 flown by Kommandeur of I./JG 51, Hptm. Heinrich Krafft, Autumn 1942

This machine was allocated the production Stammkennzeichen DJ+AM and the Werk Nummer 130539 although only the last three digits appeared on the aircraft's fin. Once in service, any traces of the Stammkennzeichen were removed and a yellow fuselage band and the Gruppenkommandeur's double chevron Stab symbols were applied. Photographic evidence suggests that the buzzard's head Geschwader badge and the Gruppe's Gemsbock, or mountain goat, badge were applied only to the port side. The overall dark camouflage is typical of the scheme applied to the first Fw 190s delivered to units serving on the Eastern Front and consisted of the colours RLM 70 and 71 applied over an earlier 74/75/76 factory finish, part of which is still visible around the swastika.

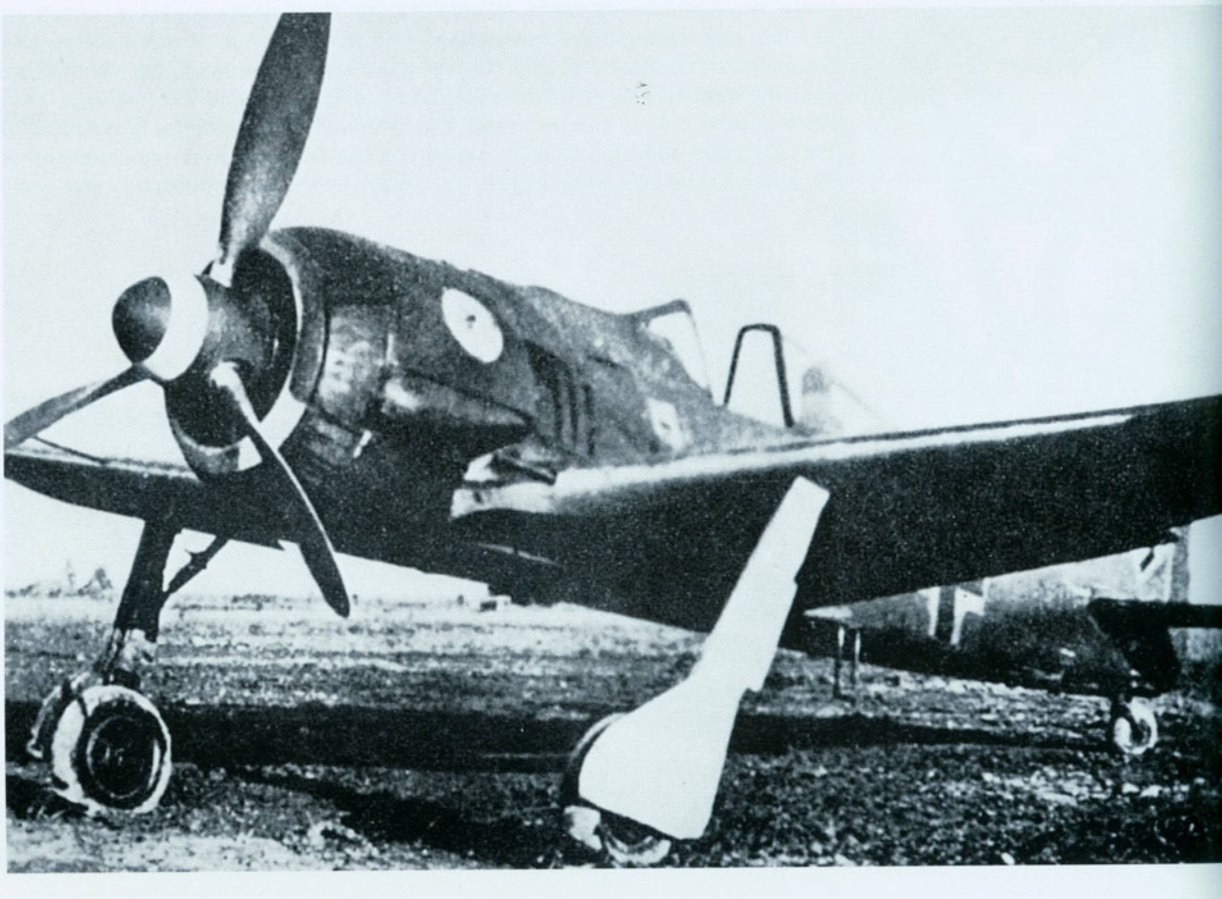


January-October 1942



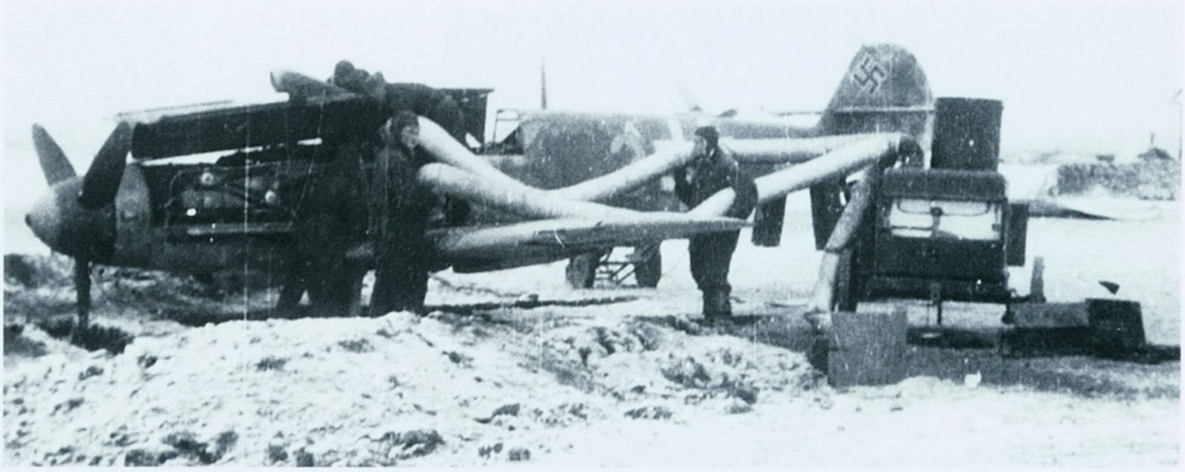


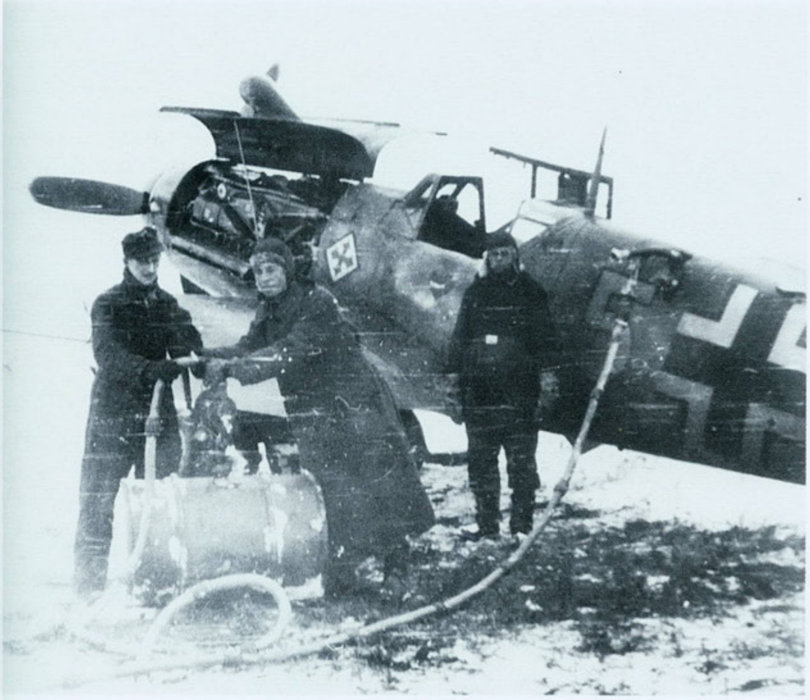
ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: Two views of Hptm. Krafft, Kommandeur of I./JG 51, and his Fw 190 A-3, clearly showing the white cap to the spinner as well as the Geschwader and Gruppe badges.



RIGHT: This Fw 190 A-3 also belonged to I./JG 51 and carried the same unit badges as Krafft's machine. Note, however, the different spinner decoration and that the yellow fuselage band has been applied to the top and bottom of the fuselage Balkenkreuz.

RIGHT AND BELOW: Ground staff servicing their aircraft in extreme conditions during the Winter of 1942/43. In the photograph (*BELOW*), 'Yellow 5' of 9./JG 52 is being refuelled, while (*RIGHT*), another Bf 109 is being made ready for an armament harmonisation check. The ground has already been prepared - no mean feat when it was frozen rock hard - and the machine has been jacked up into the correct firing position. Before any test or adjustments can be carried out, the engine and the weapons are warmed using a mobile heater.

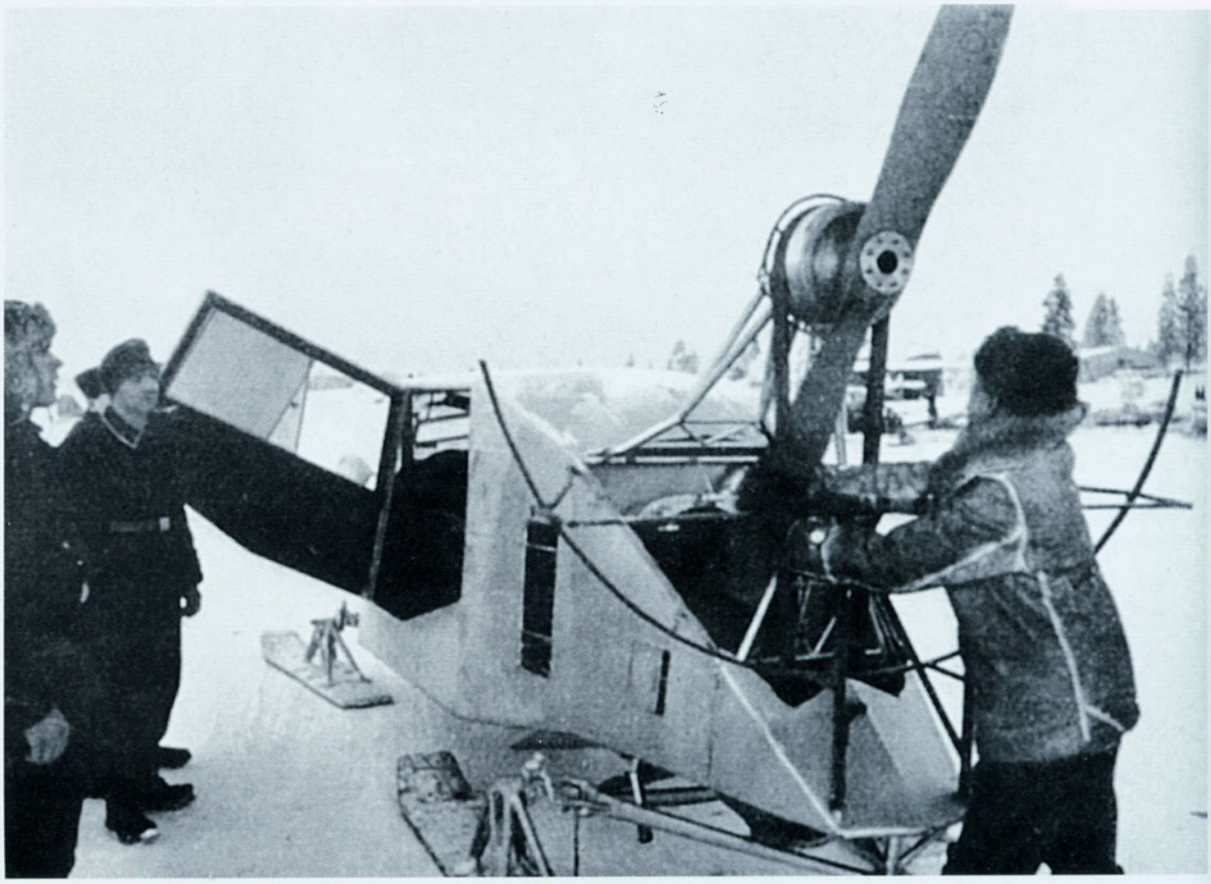




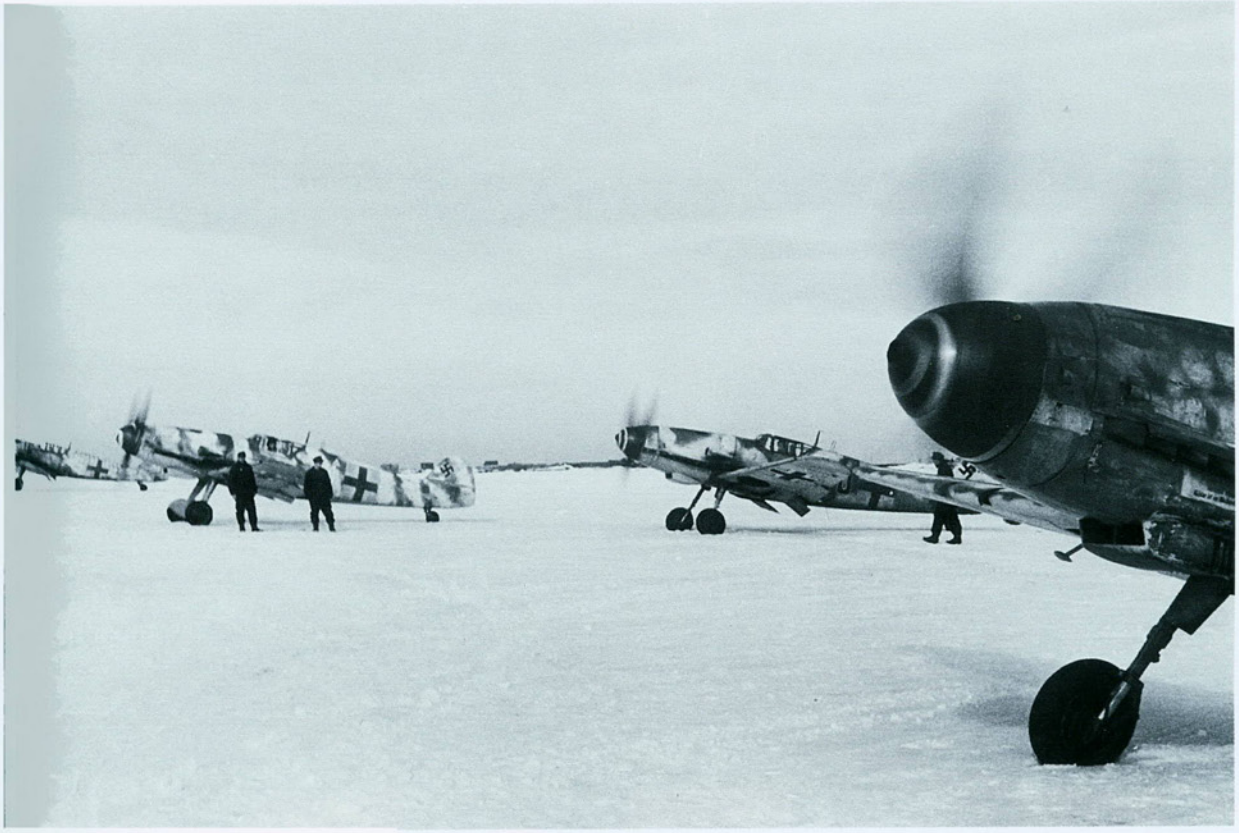
ABOVE: A mechanic directing warm air ducting from a mobile heater to melt the ice on the horizontal tail surfaces of Bf 109.

RIGHT: If no mobile heater was available, more drastic means were necessary. Here ground staff are working on the tail of a Bf 109, the man on the right breaking up the ice with a rubber or wooden hammer.

ABOVE LEFT, ABOVE AND LEFT: These pictures clearly show, the Winter conditions of late 1942 were extremely severe. Keeping the aircraft in flying condition must have taken Herculean efforts by the ground staff, who often had to carry out maintenance in the open with sometimes only the most rudimentary shelter being provided.

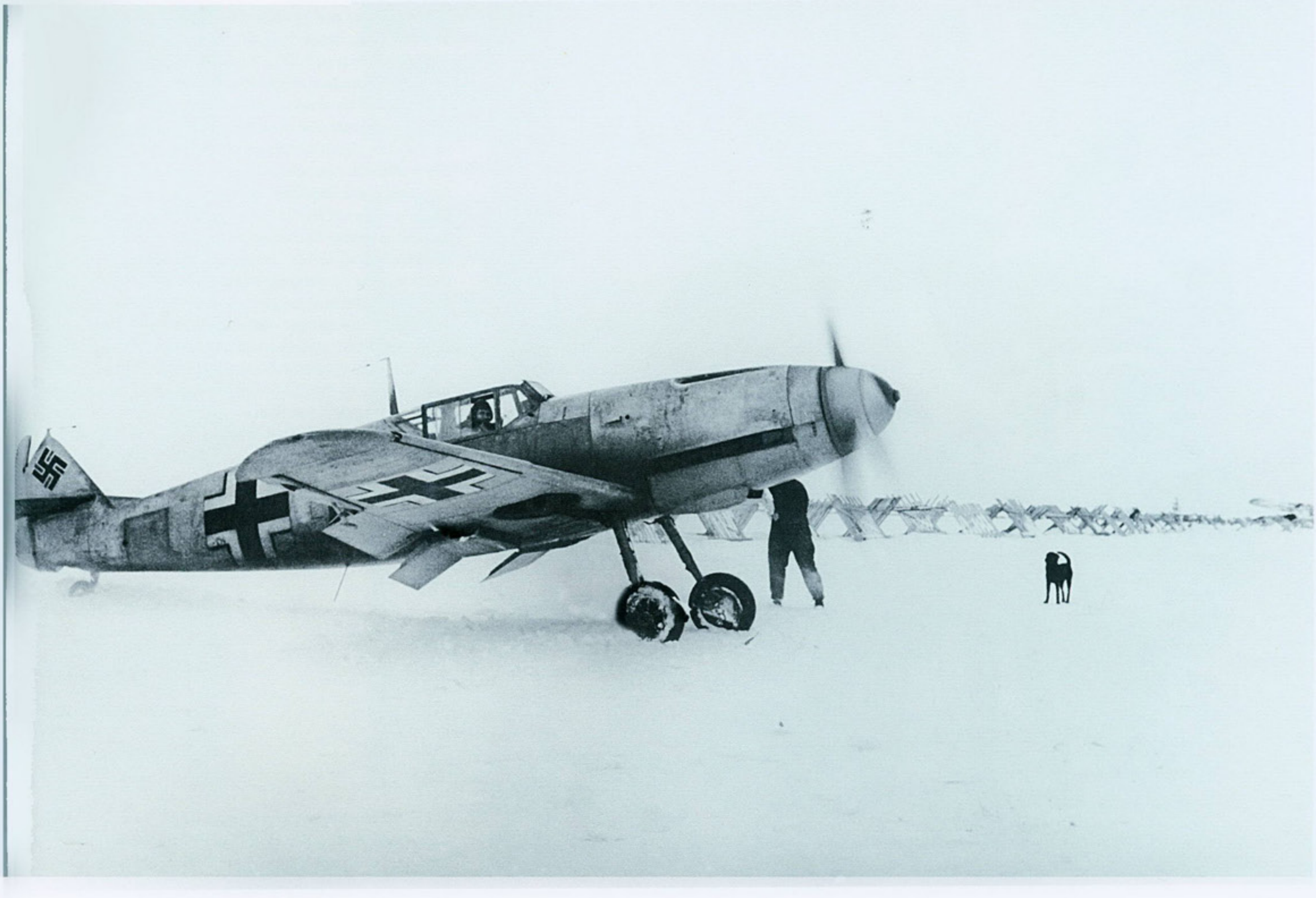


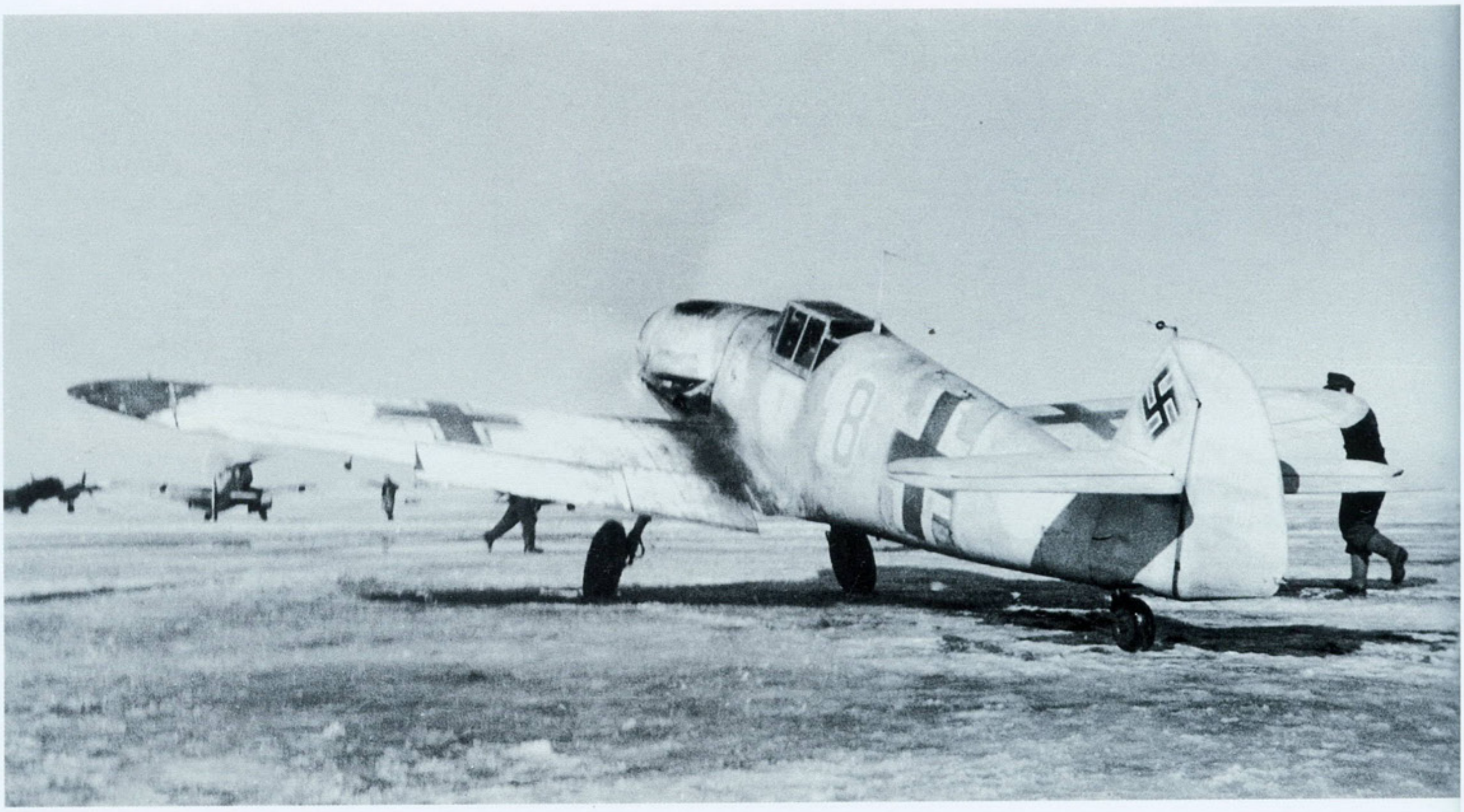
LEFT: The Soviets developed special propeller-driven sledges for crossing snow-covered ground and captured examples were quickly pressed into service by German forces. At least two types were developed, one employing a small five-cylinder radial engine connected directly to the propeller, while on this example the engine is mounted on the chassis and is connected to the propeller by a drive belt.

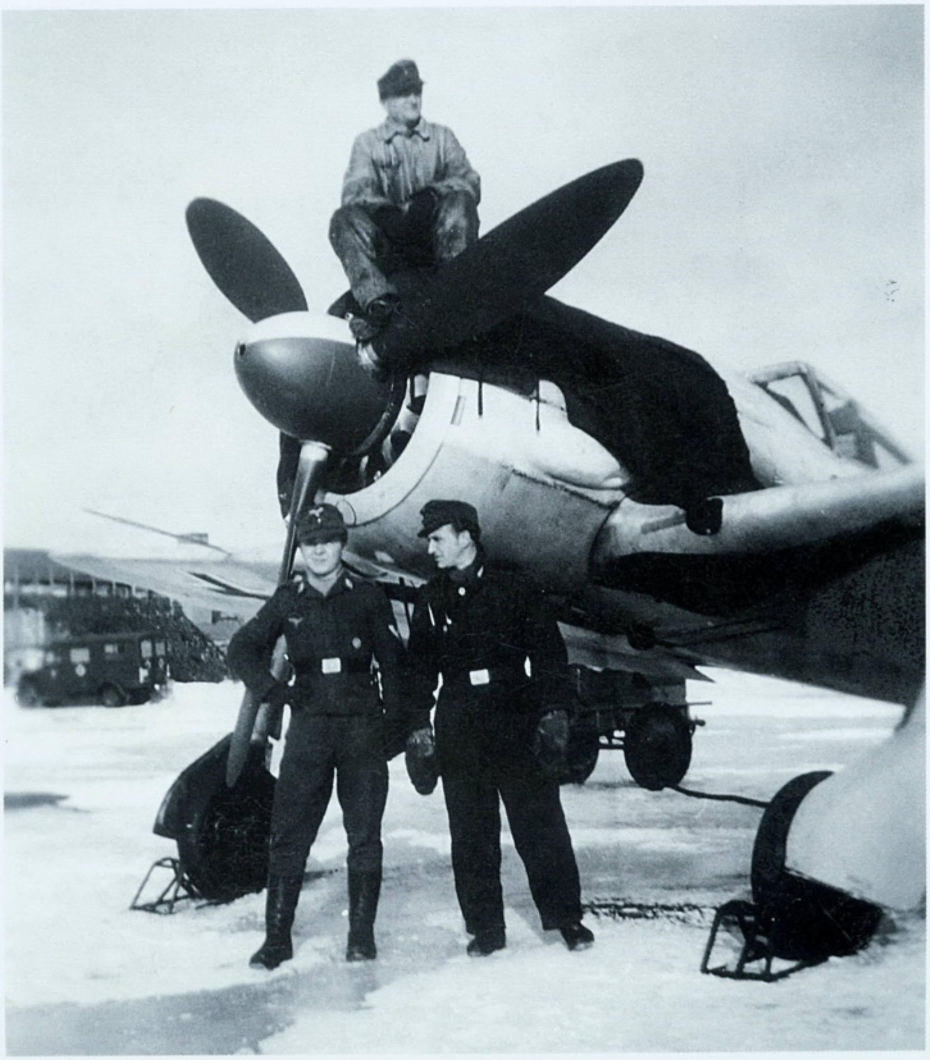


LEFT: Snow-camouflaged Bf 109 Gs of JG 52.

BELOW: By late 1942, all Luftwaffe fighter units on the Eastern Front had either converted to the Bf 109 G or had begun converting to the Fw 190. This photograph of a Bf 109 F from an unidentified unit was therefore probably taken during the Winter of 1941/42.







ABOVE: Photographed in late 1942, the unit to which this snow-camouflaged Bf 109 G-2 coded 'Yellow 8' belonged has not yet been firmly established for, although the badge below and ahead of the windscreen resembles that of I./JG 51, that Gruppe had already begun converting to the Fw 190 when this photograph was taken. The shape and position of the freshly-painted white, heart-shaped area below the cockpit would seem to indicate that the 'Green Heart' badge of JG 54 has been painted out and the style in which the yellow fuselage band has been applied is indeed usually associated with JG 54. It is therefore thought that this aircraft possibly belonged to 3./JG 54 and was photographed in the Leningrad area of the northern front during November-December 1942. Note, however, that the additional newly-painted white patches on the cowling and fuselage side suggest other overpainted unit emblems, perhaps indicating that the aircraft has already been passed on to another unit when JG 54 itself began converting to the Fw 190 at the end of 1942. Although there were 23 victory bars painted on the rudder, the pilot has not yet been identified.

LEFT: At the end of 1942, parts of JG 54 also began converting to the Fw 190. This photograph shows a machine and personnel of the I./Gruppe Stab in November 1942 at Krasnogvardeisk near Leningrad.

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